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The
CITY OF
COMRADES



BASIL KING





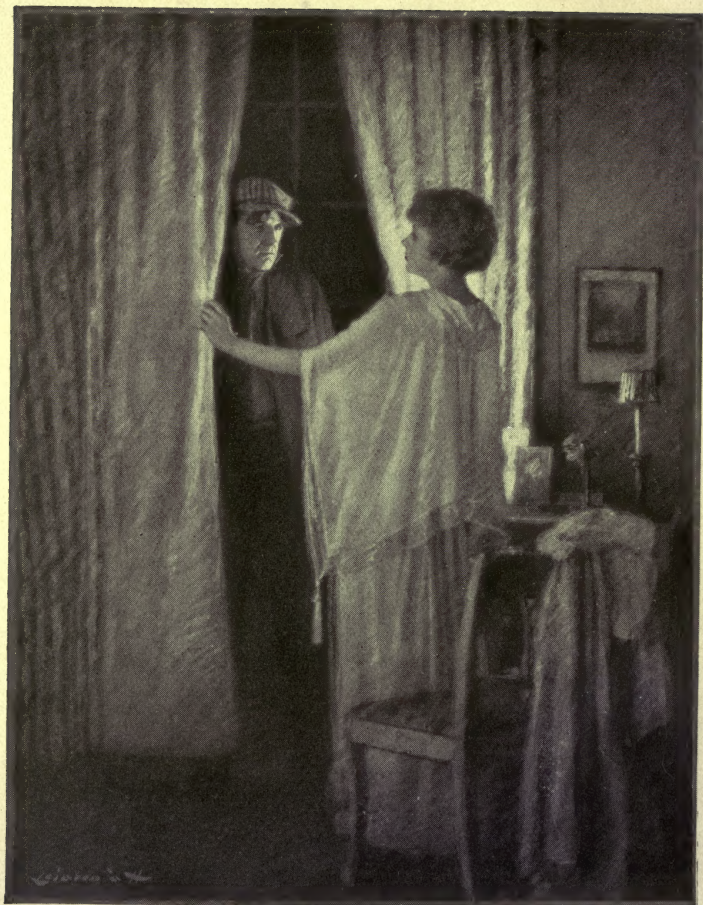


THE CITY OF COMRADES

Books BY
BASIL KING

THE CITY OF COMRADES. Illustrated
ABRAHAM'S BOSOM
THE LIFTED VEIL. Illustrated
THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS. Illustrated
THE LETTER OF THE CONTRACT. Illustrated
THE WAY HOME. Illustrated
THE WILD OLIVE. Illustrated
THE INNER SHRINE. Illustrated
THE STREET CALLED STRAIGHT. Illustrated
LET NOT MAN PUT ASUNDER
IN THE GARDEN OF CHARITY
THE STEPS OF HONOR
THE HIGH HEART. Illustrated.

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(See p. 32)

“Sh!” was the first sound that came from her. “Don’t make a noise or you’ll frighten my friend. She’s nervous already.”

The CITY OF COMRADES

BY
BASIL KING

Author of
"THE INNER SHRINE" "THE WILD OLIVE"
"THE WAY HOME" "THE HIGH HEART" ETC.

*I dream'd in a dream, I saw a city invincible to the attacks
of the whole of the rest of the earth;
I dream'd that was the new City of Friends;
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love—
it led the rest;
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
And in all their looks and words.*

—WALT WHITMAN.



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THE CITY OF COMRADES

THE CITY OF COMRADES

CHAPTER I

"No."
"No?"
"No."

In the slow swirl of Columbus Circle, at the southwest corner of Central Park, two seedy, sinister individuals could hold an exceedingly private conversation without drawing attention to themselves. There were others like us on the scene, in that month of June, 1913, cast up from the obscurest depths of New York. We could revolve there for five or ten minutes, in company with other elements of the city's life, to be eliminated by degrees, sucked into other currents, forming new combinations or reacting to the old ones.

In silence we shuffled along a few paces, though not exactly side by side. Lovey was just sufficiently behind me to be able to talk confidentially into my ear. My own manner was probably that of a man anxious to throw off a dogging inferior. Even among us there are social degrees.

"Yer'll be sorry," Lovey warned me, reproachfully.

"Very well, then," I jerked back at him over my shoulder; "I shall be sorry."

"If I didn't know it was a good thing I wouldn't 'a'

THE CITY OF COMRADES

wanted to take ye in on it—not you, I wouldn't; and dead easy."

"I don't care for it."

"Ye're only a beginner—"

"I'm not even that."

"No, ye're not even that; and this 'd larn ye. Just two old ladies—lots of money always in the 'ouse—no resistance—no weepens nor nothink o' that kind; and me knowin' every hinch of the ground through workin' for 'em two years ago—"

"And suppose they recognized you?"

"That's it. That's why I must have a pal. If they'd git a look at any one it 'd have to be at you. But you don't need to be afraid, never pinched before nor nothink. Once yer picter's in the rogues' they'll run ye in if ye so much as blow yer nose. You'd just get by as an unknown man."

"And if I didn't get by?"

"Oh, but you would, sonny. Ye're the kind. Just look at ye! Slim and easy-movin' as a snake, y'are. Ye'd go through a man's clothes while he's got 'em on, and he wouldn't notice ye no more'n a puff of wind. Look at yer 'and."

I held it up and looked at it. A year ago, a month ago, I should have studied it with remorse. Now I did it stupidly, without emotions or regrets.

It was a long, slim hand, resembling the rest of my person. It was strong, however, with big, loosely articulated knuckles and muscular thumbs—again resembling the rest of my person. At the Beaux Arts, and in an occasional architect's office, it had been spoken of as a "drawing" hand; and Lovey was now pointing out its advantages for other purposes. I laughed to myself.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Ye're too tall," Lovey went on, in his appraisal. "That's ag'in' ye. Ye must be a good six foot. But lots o' men are too tall. They gits over it by stoopin' a bit; and when ye stoops it frightens people, especially women. They ain't near as scared of a man that stands straight up as they'll be of one that crouches and wiggles away. Kind o' suggests evil to 'em, like, it does. And these two old ladies—"

As we reached the corner of the Park I rounded slowly on my tempter. Not that he thought of his offer as temptation, any more than I did; it was rather on his part a touch of solicitude. He was doing his best for me, in return for what he was pleased to take as my kindness to him during the past ten days.

He was a small, wizened man, pathetically neat in spite of cruel shabbiness. It was the kind of neatness that in our world so often differentiates the man who has dropped from him who has always been down. The gray suit, which was little more than a warp with no woof on it at all, was brushed and smoothed and mended. The flannel shirt, with turned-down collar, must have been chosen for its resistance to the show of dirt. The sky-blue tie might have been a more useful selection, but even that had had freshness steamed and pressed into it whenever Lovey had got the opportunity. Over what didn't so directly meet the eye the coat was tightly buttoned up.

The boots were the weakest point, as they are with all of us. They were not noticeably broken, but they were wrinkled and squashed and down at the heel. They looked as if they had been worn by other men before having come to the present possessor; and mine looked the same. When I went into offices to apply for work it was always my boots that I tried to keep out of sight; but it

THE CITY OF COMRADES

was precisely what the eye of the fellow in command seemed determined to search out and judge me by.

You must not think of Lovey as a criminal. He had committed petty crimes and he had gone to jail for them; but it had only been from the instinct of self-preservation. He worked when he got a job; but he never kept a job, because his habits always fired him. Then he lived as he could, lifting whatever small object came his way—an apple from a fruit-stall, a purse a lady had inadvertently laid down, a bag in a station, an umbrella forgotten in a corner—anything! The pawnshops knew him so well that he was afraid to go into them any more—except when he was so tired that he wanted to be sent to the Island for a month's rest. In general, he disposed of his booty for a few pennies to children, to poverty-stricken mothers of families, to pals in the saloons. As long as a few dollars lasted he lived, as he himself would have said, honestly. When he was driven to it he filched again; but only when he was driven to it.

It was ten days now since he had begun following me about, somewhat as a stray dog will follow you when you have given him a bone and a drink of water. For a year and more I had seen him in one or another of the dives I hung about. The same faces always turn up there, and we get to have the kind of acquaintance, silent, haunted, tolerant, that binds together souls in the Inferno. In general, it is a great fraternity; but now and then—often for reasons no one could fathom—some one is excluded. He comes and goes, and the others follow him with resentful looks and curses. Occasionally he is kicked out, which was what happened to Lovey whenever his weakness afforded the excuse.

It was when he was kicked out of Stinson's that I had

THE CITY OF COMRADES

picked him up. It was after midnight. It was cold. The sight of the abject face was too much for me.

"Come along home with me, Lovey," I had said, casually; and he came.

Home was no more than a stifling garret, and Lovey slept on the floor like a dog. But in the morning I found my shoes cleaned as well as he could clean them without brush or blacking, my clothes folded, and the whole beastly place in such order as a friendly hand could bring to it. Lovey himself was gone.

Twice during the interval he had stolen in in the same way and stolen out. He asked no more than a refuge and the privilege of sidling timidly up to me with a beseeching look in his sodden eyes when we met in bars. Once, when by hook or by crook he had got possession of a dollar, he insisted on the honor of "buying me a drink."

On this particular afternoon I had met him by chance in the region of Broadway between Forty-second Street and Columbus Circle. I can still recall the shy, half-frightened pleasure in his face as he saw me advancing toward him. He might have been a young girl.

"Got somethin' awful good, sonny, to let ye in on," were the words with which he stopped me.

I turned round and walked back with him to the Circle, and round it.

"No, Lovey," I said decidedly, when we had got to the corner of the Park, "it's not good enough. I've other fish to fry."

A hectic flush stole into the cheeks, which kept a marvelous youth and freshness. The thin, delicate features, ascetic rather than degraded, sharpened with a frosty look of disappointment.

"Well, just as you think best, sonny," he said, re-

THE CITY OF COMRADES

signedly. He asked, abruptly, however, "When did ye have yer last meal?"

"The day before yesterday."

"And when d'ye expect to have yer next?"

"Oh, I don't know. Sometime; possibly to-night."

"Possibly to-night— 'Ow?"

"I tell you I don't know. Something will happen. If it doesn't—well, I'll manage."

He had found an opening.

"Don't ye see ye carn't go on like that? Ye've got to live."

"Oh no, I haven't."

"Don't say that, sonny," he burst out, tenderly. "Ye've got to live! Ye must do it—for my sake—now. I suppose it's because we're—we're Britishers together." He looked round on the circling crowd of Slavs, Mongolians, Greeks, Italians, aliens of all sorts. "We're different from these Yankees, ain't we?"

Admitting our Anglo-Saxon superiority, I was about to say, "Well, so long, Lovey," and shake him off, when he put in, piteously, "I suppose I can come up and lay down on yer floor again to-night?"

"I wish you could, Lovey," I responded. "But—but the fact is I—I haven't got that place any more."

"Fired?"

I nodded.

"Where've ye gone?"

"Nowhere."

"Where did ye sleep last night?"

I described the exact spot in the lumber-yard near Greeley's Slip. He knew it. He had made use of its hospitality himself on warm summer nights such as we were having.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Goin' there again to-night?"

I said I didn't know.

He gazed at me with a kind of timid daring. "You wouldn't be—you wouldn't be goin' to the Down and Out Club?"

I smiled.

"Why should you ask me that?"

"Oh, I don't know. See you talkin' to one of those fellas oncet. Chap named Pyncheon. Worse than missions and 'vangelists, they are."

"Did you ever think of going there yourself?"

"Oh, Lord love ye! I've thought of it, yes. But I've fought it off. Once ye do that ye're done for."

"Well, I don't believe I'm done for—" I began; but he interrupted me coaxingly.

"I say, sonny. I'll go to Greeley's Slip. Then if you've nothin' else on 'and, you come there, too—and we'll be fellas together. But don't—don't—go to the Down and Out!"

As I walked away from him I had his "fellas together" amusingly, and also pathetically, in my heart. Lovey was little better than an outcast. I knew him by no name but that which some pothouse wag had fixed on him derisively. From hints he had dropped I gathered that he had had a wife and daughters somewhere in the world, and intuitively I got the impression that without being a criminal he had been connected with a crime. As to his personal history he had never confided to me any of the details beyond the fact that in his palmy days he had been in a 'at-shop in the Edgware Road. I fancied that at some time or another in his career his relatives in London—like my own in Canada—had made up a lump sum and bidden him begone to the land of reconstruction.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

There he had become what he was—an outcast. There I was becoming an outcast likewise. We were “fellas together.” I was thirty-one and he was fifty-two. My comparative youth helped me, in that I didn’t look older than my age; but he might easily have been seventy.

Having got rid of him, I drifted diagonally across the Park, but with a certain method in the seeming lack of method in taking my direction. Though I had an objective point, I didn’t dare to approach it otherwise than by a roundabout route. It is probable that no gaze but that of the angels was upon me; but to me it seemed as if every glance that roved up and down the Park must spot my aim.

For this reason I assumed a manner meant to throw observation off the scent. I loitered to look at young people on horseback or to stare at some specially dashing motor-car. I strolled into by-paths and out of them. I passed under the noses of policemen in gray-blue uniforms and tried to infuse my carriage with the fact which Lovey had emphasized, that I had never yet been pinched. I had never yet, so far as I knew, done anything to warrant pinching; and that I had no intentions beyond those of the ordinary law-abiding citizen was what I hoped my swagger would convey.

Though I was shabby, I was not sufficiently so to be unworthy to take the air. The worst that could be said of me was that I was not shabby as the working-man is at liberty to be. Mine was the suspicious, telltale shabbiness of the gentleman—far more damning than the grime and sweat of a chimney-sweep.

Now that I was alone again, I had a return of the sensation that had been on me since waking in the morning—that I was walking in the air. I felt that I bounced like

THE CITY OF COMRADES

a bubble every time I stepped. The day before I had been giddy; now I was only light. It was as if at any minute I might go up. Unconsciously I ground my footsteps into the gravel or the grass to keep myself on the solid earth.

It was not the first time I had gone without food for twenty-four hours, but it was the first time I had done it for forty-eight. Moreover, it was the first time I had ever been without some prospect of food ahead of me. With a meal surely in sight on the following day I could have waited for it. More easily I could have waited for a drink or two. Drink kept me going longer than food, for in spite of the reaction after it the need of it had grown more insistent. Had I been offered my choice between food and life, on the one hand, and drink and death, on the other, I think I should have chosen drink and death.

But now there was no likelihood of either. I had husbanded my last pennies after my last meal, to make them spin out to as many drinks as possible. I had begged a few more drinks, and cadged a few more. But I had come to my limit in all these directions. Before I sought the shelter of Greeley's Slip a hint had been given me at Stinson's that I might come in for the compliments showered on Lovey ten days previously. Now as I walked in the Park the craving inside me was not because I hadn't eaten, but because I hadn't drunk that day.

Two or three bitter temptations assailed me before I reached Fifth Avenue. One was in the form of a pretty girl of eight or ten, who came mincing down a flowery path, holding a quarter between the thumb and forefinger of her left hand. Satan must have sent her. I could have snatched the quarter and made my escape, only that I lacked the nerve. Then there was a newsboy count-

THE CITY OF COMRADES

ing his gains on a bench. They were laid out in rows before him—pennies, nickels, and dimes. I stood for a minute and looked down at him, estimating the ease with which I could have stooped and swept them all into my palm. He looked up and smiled. The smile didn't disarm me; I was beyond the reach of any such appeal. It was again that I didn't have the nerve. Lastly an old woman, a nurse, was dealing out coins to three small children that they might make purchases of a blind man selling bootlaces and pencils. I could have swiped them all as neatly as a croupier pulls in louis d'or with his rake—but I was afraid.

These were real temptations, as fierce as any I ever faced. By the time I had reached the Avenue I was in a cold perspiration, as much from a sense of failure as from the effort at resistance. I wondered how I should ever carry out the plans I had in mind if I was to balk at such little things as this.

The plans I had in mind still kept me from making headway as the crow flies. I went far up the Avenue; I crossed into Madison Avenue; I went up that again; I crossed into Park Avenue. I crossed and recrossed and crisscrossed and descended, and at last found myself strolling by a house toward which I scarcely dared to turn my eyes, feeling that even for looking at it I might be arrested.

I slackened my pace so as to verify all the points which experts had underscored in my hearing. There was the vacant lot which the surrounding buildings rendered so dark at night. There was the low, red-brown fence inclosing the back premises, over which a limber, long-legged fellow like me could leap in a second. There were the usual numerous windows—to kitchen, scullery, pantry,

THE CITY OF COMRADES

laundry—of any good-sized American house, some one of which was pretty sure to be left unguarded on a summer night. There were the neighboring yards, with more low fences, offering excellent cover in a get-away, with another vacant lot leading out on another street a little farther down.

I had so many times strolled by the house as I was doing now, and had so many times rehearsed its characteristics, that I made the final review with some exactitude before passing on my way.

My way was not far. There was nothing to do but to go back into the Park. As it was nearly six o'clock, it was too late to search for a job that day, and I should have had no heart for doing so in any case. I had found a job that morning—that of handling big packing-cases in a warehouse—but I was too exhausted for the work. When in the effort to lift one onto a truck I collapsed and nearly fainted, I was told in a choice selection of oaths to beat it as no good.

I sat on a bench, therefore, waiting for the dark and thinking of the house of which I had just inspected the outside. It was not a house picked at random. It was one that had possessed an interest for me during all the three years I had been in New York. I had, in fact, brought a letter of introduction to its owner from the man under whom I had worked in Montreal. Chiefly through my own carelessness, nothing came of that, but I never failed, when I passed this way, to stare at the dwelling as one in which I might have had a footing.

The occupant was also a well-known architect in New York. In the architects' offices in which I found employment I heard him praised, criticized, condemned. His work was good or bad according to the speaker's point of

THE CITY OF COMRADES

view. I thought it tolerably good, with an over-emphasis on ornament.

It was an odd fact that, in starting out on what was clear in my mind as a new phase in my career, no other house suggested itself as a field of operations. As to this one I felt documented, and that was all. I had no sense of horror at what I was about to do; no remorse from the position from which I had fallen. I suppose my mind was too sick for that, and my body too imperatively clamorous. I had said to Lovey that I didn't have to live—but I did. I had seen that very morning that I did. I had stood at the edge of Greeley's Slip and watched the swirling of the brown-green water with a view to making an end of it. One step and I should be out of all this misery and disgrace! The world would be rid of me; my family would be rid of me; I should be rid of myself, which would be best of all. Had I been quite sure as to the last point, I think I could have done it. But I wasn't quite sure. I was far from quite sure. I could imagine the step over the edge of Greeley's Slip as a step into conditions worse than those I was enduring now; and so I had drawn back. I had drawn back and wandered up-town, in the hope of securing a job that would give me a breakfast.

I wonder if you have ever done that? I wonder if you have ever gone from dock to station and from station to shop and from shop to warehouse, wherever heavy, unskilled labor may be in demand, and extra hands are treated with a brutality that slaves would kick against, in the hope of earning fifty cents? I wonder if in your grown-up life you have ever known a minute when fifty cents stood for your salvation? I wonder if with fifty cents standing for your salvation you ever saw the day

THE CITY OF COMRADES

when you couldn't get it? No? Then you will hardly understand how natural, how much a matter of course, the thing had become which I was resolved to do.

It was no sudden idea. I had been living in the company of men who took such feats for granted. Their talk had amazed me at first, but I had grown used to it. I had grown used to the thing. I had come to find a piquancy in the thought of it.

Then Lovey's suggestions had not been thrown away on me. True, he was out for small game, while I, if I went in for it, would want something bigger and more exciting; but the basic idea was the same. Lovey could make a haul and live for weeks on the fruit of it; I might do the same and live for months. And if I didn't pull it off successfully, if I was nabbed and sent away—why, then there would be some let-up in the struggle which had become so infernal. Even if I got a shot through the heart—and the tales I heard were full of such accidents—the tragedy would not lack its element of relief. It might be out of one hell into another—but it would at least be out of one.

Not that I hadn't found a bitter pleasure in the life! I had. I found it still. In one of Dostoyevsky's novels an old rake talks of the joys of being in the gutter. Well, there are such joys. They are not joys that civilization knows or that aspiration would find legitimate; but one reaches a point at which it is a satisfaction to be oneself at one's worst. Where all the pretenses with which poor human nature covers itself up are cast aside the soul can stalk forth nakedly, hideously, and be unashamed. In the presence of each other we were always unashamed. We could kick over all standards, we could drop all poses, we could flout all duties, we could own to all crimes, and

THE CITY OF COMRADES

be "fellas together." As I went lower and lower down it became to me a kind of acrid delight, of positively intellectual delight, to know that I was herding with the most degraded, and that there was no baseness or bestiality to which I was not at liberty to submit myself.

If there had never been any reactions from this state of mind!—but God!

It was a disadvantage to me that I was not like my cronies. I couldn't open my lips without betraying the fact that I belonged to another sphere. Though the broken-down man of education is not unknown in the underworld, he is comparatively rare. He is comparatively rare and under suspicion, like a white swan in a flock of black ones. I might be open-handed, ingratiating, and absurdly fellow-well-met, but I was always an outsider. They would take my drinks, they would return me drinks, we would swap stories and experiences with all outward show of equality; but no one knew better than myself that I was not on a footing with the rest of them. Women took to me readily enough, but men were always on their guard. Try as I would I never found a mate among them, I never made a friend. Therefore, now that I was down and out, I had no one of whom to ask a good turn, no one who would have done me a good turn, but poor, useless old Lovey sneaking in the shade.

I was in a measure between two worlds. I had been ejected from one without having forced a way into the other. When I say ejected I mean the word. The bitterest moment in my life was on that night when my eldest brother came to his door in Montreal and gave me fifty dollars, with the words:

"And now get out! Don't let any of us ever see your face or hear your name again."

THE CITY OF COMRADES

As I stumbled down the steps he gave me a kick that didn't reach me and which I had lost the right to resent. He himself went back to the dinner-party his wife was entertaining inside, and of which the talk and laughter reached me as I stood humbly on the door-step. From the other side of the street I looked back at the lighted windows. It was the last touch of connection with my family.

But it had been a kindly, patient family. My father was one of the best known and most highly honored among Canadian public men. As he had married an American, I had a good many cousins in New York, though I had not made myself known to any of them since coming there to live. I didn't want them. Had I met one of them in the street, I should have passed without speaking; but, as it happened, I never met one. I saw their names in the papers, and that was all.

My father and mother had had five children, of whom I was the fourth. My two brothers were married, prosperous and respected—one a lawyer in Montreal, the other a banker in Toronto. My elder sister was married to a colonel in the British army; the younger one—the only member of the family younger than myself—still lived at home.

We three sons were all graduates of McGill, in addition to which I had been sent to the Beaux Arts in Paris. Out of that I had come with some degree of credit; and there had been a year in which I was in sight—oh, very distant sight!—of the beginning of the fulfilment of my childhood's ambition to revolutionize the art of architecture in Canada. But in the second year that vision went out; and in the third came the night on my brother Jerry's door-step.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

I had nothing to complain of. The family had borne with me—and borne with me. When we reached the time when I was supposed to be earning my own living and my father's allowance came to an end, my mother, who had some money of her own, kept it up. She would be keeping it up still if she knew where I was—but she didn't know. From the moment of leaving Montreal I decided to carry out Jerry's injunction. They should neither see my face nor hear my name again. I didn't stop to consider how cruel this would be to the best mother a man ever had—to say nothing of the best father—or rather, when I did stop to consider it it seemed to me that I was taking the kindest course. I had no confidence in myself or in the future. New surroundings and associations would not give me a new heart, whatever hopes those who wished me well might be building on the change. For a new heart I needed something which I hadn't got and saw no means of getting.

CHAPTER II.

SOMEWHERE about dusk I fell asleep. It was dark when I woke up. It was dark and still and sultry, as it often is in New York in the middle of June.

The lamps were lit in the Park, and in their glow shadowy forms moved stealthily. When they went in twos I took them to be lovers; when they went alone I put them down as prowlers of the night. I didn't know what they were after, but whatever it might be I was sure it was no good.

Not that that mattered to me! I had long been in a situation where I couldn't be particular. When I had risen and stretched myself I, too, moved stealthily, dogged by a crime I hadn't yet committed, but of which the guilt was already in the air.

As I had nothing by which to tell the time, I was obliged to wait till a clock struck. I hoped it was eleven at least, but when the sound came over the trees it was only nine. Only nine, and I could do nothing before one! Nothing before one, and nowhere to go! Nowhere to go, and no food to eat, and not a drop to drink! Doubtless I could have found water; but water made me sick. With four hours to wait, I thought again of the dark river with its velvety current, running below Greeley's Slip.

Aimlessly I drifted toward it—that is, I drifted toward Columbus Circle, whence I could drift farther still through squalid, fetid, dimly lighted streets down to the water's

THE CITY OF COMRADES

edge. The night was so hot that the thought of the plunge began to appeal to me. After all, it would be an easy, pleasant way of stepping out.

But I didn't do it. The unknown beyond the river once more drove me back. Besides, the adventure I had planned was not without its fascination. I wanted to see what it held in store. If it held nothing—well, then, Greeley's Slip would still be accessible in the morning.

So I skulked back into the depths of the Park again. Those who went as twos began to disappear, and the lonely shadows to steal along more furtively. Now and then one of them approached me or hung in the distance suggestively. It was not like any of the encounters that take place in daylight. It was more as if these dark ghosts had floated up from some evil spirit land, into which before morning they would float down again.

But twelve o'clock struck at last, and I took midnight as a call. It was a call to leave the great human division in which I had hitherto been classed, and become a criminal. Once I had done this thing, I should never be able to go back. The angel with the flaming sword would guard that way, and I could never regain even such status as that which I was abandoning.

If my head had not been swimming I might at the last minute have felt a qualm at that, but my mind had lost the faculty of deconcentration. It was fixed on the thing before me in such a way that I couldn't get it off. For this reason I went, on leaving the Park, directly to the street and number where my thoughts were.

I was surprised by the emptiness and silence of the thoroughfares. Not till then had I remembered that at this season of the year most of the houses would be closed. Closed they were, looking dark and blank and forbidding.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

I happened to know that the house to which I was bound was not closed; and though the fact that there were so few to pass in the streets rendered me more conspicuous, it also made me the less subject to observation.

Indeed, there were no observers at all when I approached the black spot made by the vacant lot. There was nothing but myself and the blackness. Not a light in the house! Hardly a light in any of the houses roundabout! Not a footfall on the pavements! If ever there was a good opportunity to do what I had come for, it was mine.

But I passed. The black spot frightened me. It was like a black gulf into which I might sink down. I re-passed.

I went farther up the street and took myself to task. It was a repetition of my recoil from the children in the afternoon. I must have the nerve—or I must own to myself that I hadn't. If I hadn't it, then I had no alternative but Greeley's Slip.

I turned in my steps and passed the house again. If from the blank windows any one had been looking out my actions would have been suspicious. I went far down the street, and came back again far up it. Then when I had no more power of arguing with myself I suddenly found my footsteps crushing the dusty, sun-dried shoots of nettle and blue succory. I was in the vacant lot.

All at once fear left me. As well as any old hand in the business I seemed to know what lay before me. At every second some low-down prompting, sprung from nameless depths in my nature, told me what to do.

I noted in the first place how accurate the experts had been as to light and shade. The house stood so far up on one of the long avenues that the buildings were thinning out. So, too, the street lamps. They were no more

THE CITY OF COMRADES

than in the proportion of two to three as compared to their numbers half a mile lower down. Just here they were so placed that not a ray fell into the three or four thousand square feet which had probably never been built upon since Manhattan was inhabited. Even the wall of the house was windowless on this side, for the reason that within a few months some new building would probably block the outlook.

Once I had crept close to the wall, I knew I presented neither silhouette nor shade to any chance passer-by. I could feel my way at leisure, cautiously treading burdock and fireweed underfoot. I came to the low wooden fence, in which there was a gate for tradesmen, which was possibly unlocked; but I didn't run the risk of a click. With my long legs a stride took me over into a small brick-paved court.

I paused to reconnoiter. The obscurity here was so dense that only my architect's instincts told me where the doors and windows would probably be. I located them by degrees. The doors I let alone. The windows I tried, first one and then another, but with no success. There was probably some simple fastening that I could have dealt with had I had a pocket-knife, but the one I had carried for years had long since been lying in a pawnshop. To reflect I sat down on the cover of a bin that was doubtless used for refuse.

A footstep alarmed me. It was heavy, measured, slow. With the ease of a snake I was down on my belly, crawling toward cover. Cover offered itself in the form of the single shrub that the court contained—lilac or syringa—growing close against the kitchen wall. Lovey would have commended the silence and swiftness with which I slipped behind it.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

The footstep receded, slow, measured, heavy. Coming to the conclusion that it was a policeman in the Avenue, I raised my head. I had no sense of queerness in my situation. It seemed as much a matter of course as if I had been doing the same sort of thing ever since I was born.

There was apparently a providence in all this, for, looking up, I spied a window I had not seen before, because it was hidden by the shrub. This, if any, would have been neglected by the servants when they went to bed.

With scarcely the stirring of a leaf I got on my feet again—and, lo! the miracle. The window was actually open. I had nothing to do but push it a few inches higher, drag myself up and wriggle in. I accomplished this without a sound that could be detected twenty feet away.

Coming down on my hands and knees, I found myself amid the odor of eatables, chiefly that of fruit. I rested a minute to get my bearings, which I did by the sense of smell. I knew I must be in a sort of pantry. By putting out my hands carefully, so as to knock nothing over, I perceived that it was little more than a closet with shelves. A thrill of excitement passed through me from head to foot when my hand rested on an apple.

I ate the apple there and then, kneeling upright, my toes bent under me. I ate another and another. Feeling cautiously, I discovered a tin box in which there were bread and cake. I ate of both. Getting softly on my feet, I groped for other things, which proved in the main to be no more than tea, coffee, spices, and starch. Then my fingers ran over a strawlike surface, and I knew I had hold of a demijohn.

Smell told me that it contained sherry, and such knowl-

THE CITY OF COMRADES

edge of housekeeping as I possessed suggested that it was cooking-sherry. I took a long swig of it. Two long swigs were enough. It burnt me, and yet it braced me. With the food I had eaten I felt literally like a giant refreshed with wine.

It occurred to me that this was a point at which I might draw back. But the spell of the unknown was upon me, and I determined to go at least a little farther. Very, very stealthily I opened the door.

I was not in a kitchen, as I expected to find myself, but in a servants' dining-room. I got the dim outlines of chairs and what I took to be a dresser or a bookcase. Another open door led into a hall.

My knowledge of the planning of houses aided me at each step I took. From the hallway I could place the kitchen, the laundry, and the back staircase. I knew the front hall lay beyond a door which was closed. At the foot of the back staircase I stood for some minutes and listened. Not a sound came from anywhere in the house. The kitchen clock ticked loudly, and presently startled me with a gurgle and a chuckle before it struck one. After this manifestation I had to wait till my heart stopped thumping, and my nerves were quieted before venturing on the stairs. As the first step creaked, I kept close to the wall to get a firmer support for my tread. On reaching a landing I could see up into another hall. Here I perceived the glimmer or reflection of a light. It was a very dim or distant light—but it was a light.

I stood on the landing and waited. If there were people moving about I should hear them soon. But all I did hear was the heavy breathing of the servants, who were sleeping on the topmost floor.

Creeping a little farther up, I discovered that the light

THE CITY OF COMRADES

was in a bedroom—the first to open from the front hall up-stairs. Between the front hall and the back hall the door was ajar. That would make things easier for me, and I dragged myself noiselessly to the top. I was now at the head of the first flight of back stairs, and looking into the master's section of the house. Except for that one dim light the house was dark. It was not, however, so dark that my architect's eye couldn't make a mental map quite sufficient for my guidance.

It was clearly a dwelling that had been added to, with some rambling characteristics. The first few feet of the front hall were on a level with the back hall, after which came a flight of three or four steps to a higher plane, which ran the rest of the depth of the building to the window over the front door. In the faint radiance through this window I could discern a high-boy, a bureau, and some chairs against the wall. I could see, too, that from this higher level one staircase ran down to the front door and another up to a third story. What was chiefly of moment to me was the fact that the bedroom with the light was lower than the rest of this part of the house, and somewhat cut off from it.

With movements as quiet as a cat's I got myself where I could peep into the bedroom where the lamp burned. It proved to be a small electric lamp with a rose-colored shade, standing beside a bed. It was a rose-colored room, evidently that of a young lady. But there was no young lady there. There was no one.

The fact that surprises me as I record all this is that I was so extraordinarily cool. I was cooler in the act than I am in the memory of it. I walked into that bedroom as calmly as if it had been my own.

It was a pretty room, with the usual notes of photo-

THE CITY OF COMRADES

graphs, bibelots, and flowered cretonne which young women like. The walls were in a light, cool green set off by a few colored reproductions of old Italian masters. Over the small white virginal bed was a copy of Fra Angelico's "Annunciation." Two windows, one of which was a bay, were shaded by loosely hanging rose-colored silk, and before the bay window the curtains were drawn. Diagonally across the corner of this window, but within the actual room, stood a simple white writing-desk, with a white dressing-table near it, but against the wall. On the table lay a gold-mesh purse, in which there was money. I slipped it into my pocket, with some satisfaction in securing the first fruits of my adventure.

With such booty as this it again occurred to me to be on the safe side and to go back by the way I came. I was, in fact, looking round me to see if there was any other small valuable object I could lift before departing when I heard a door open in some distant part of the house—and voices.

They were women's voices, or, rather, as I speedily inferred, girls' voices. By listening intently I drew the conclusion that two girls had come out of a room on the third floor and were coming down the stairs.

It was the minute to make off, and I tried to do so. I might have effected my escape had I not been checked by the figure of a man looming up suddenly before me. He sprang out of nowhere—a tall, slender man, in a dark-blue suit, with trousers baggy at the knees, and wearing an old golfing-cap. I jumped back from him in terror, only to find that it was my own reflection in the pier-glass. But the few seconds' delay lost me my chance to get away.

By the time I had tiptoed to the door the voices were

THE CITY OF COMRADES

on the same floor as myself. Two girls were advancing along the hall, evidently making their way to this chamber. My retreat being cut off, I looked wildly about for a place in which to hide myself. In the instants at my disposal I could discover nothing more remote than the bay window, screened by its loose rose-colored hangings. By the time the young ladies were on the threshold I was established there, with the silk sections pulled together and held tightly in my hand.

The first words I heard were: "But it will seem so like a habit. Men will be afraid of you."

This voice was light, silvery, and staccato. That which replied had a deep mezzo quality, without being quite contralto.

"They won't be nearly so much afraid of me," it said, fretfully, "as I am of them. I wish—I wish they'd let me alone!"

"Oh, well, they won't do that—not yet awhile; unless, as I say, they see you're hopeless. Really, dear, when a girl breaks a third engagement—"

"They must see that she wouldn't do it if she didn't have to. Here—this is the hook that always bothers me."

There were tears in the mezzo voice now, with a hint of exasperation that might have been due to the lover or the hook, I couldn't be sure which.

"But that's what I don't see—"

"You don't see it because you don't know Stephen—that is, you don't know him well."

"But from what I do know of him—"

"He seems very nice. Yes, of course! But, good Heavens! Elsie, I want a husband who's something more than very nice!"

"And yet that's pretty good, as husbands go."

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"If I can't reach a higher standard than as husbands go I sha'n't marry any one."

"Which seems to me what's very likely to happen."

"So it seems to me."

The silence that followed was full of soft, swishing sounds, which I judged to come from the taking off of a dress and the putting on of some sort of negligée. From my experience of the habits of girls, as illustrated by my sisters and their friends, I supposed that they were lending each other services in the processes of undoing. The girl with the mezzo voice had gone up to Elsie's room to undo her; Elsie had come down to render similar assistance. There is probably a psychological connection between this intimate act and confidence, since girls most truly bare their hearts to each other when they ought to be going to bed.

The mezzo young lady was moving about the room when the conversation was taken up again.

"I don't understand," Elsie complained, "why you should have got engaged to Stephen in the first place."

"I don't, either"—she was quite near me now, and threw something that might have been a brooch or a chain on the little white desk—"except on the ground that I wanted to try him."

"Try him? What do you mean?"

"Well, what's an engagement? Isn't it a kind of experiment? You get as near to marriage as you can, while still keeping free to draw back. To me it's been like going down to the edge of the water in which you can commit suicide, and finding it so cold that you go home again."

"Don't you ever mean to be married at all?" Elsie demanded, impatiently.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"I don't mean to be married till I'm sure."

Elsie burst out indignantly: "Regina Barry, that's the most pusillanimous thing I ever heard. You might as well say you'd never cross the Atlantic unless you were sure the ship would reach the other side."

"My trouble about crossing the Atlantic is in making up my mind whether or not I want to go on board. One might be willing to risk the second step, but one can't risk the first. Even the hymn that says 'One step enough for me' implies that at least you know what that's to be."

"You mean that you balk at marriage in any case."

"I mean that I balk at marriage with any of the men I've been engaged to. I must say that; and I can't say more."

During another brief silence I surmised that Regina Barry had seated herself before the dressing-table and was probably doing something to her hair. I wish I could say here that in my eavesdropping I experienced a sense of shame; but I can't. Whatever creates a sense of shame had been warped in me. The moral transitions that had turned me into a burglar had been gradual but sure. With the gold-mesh purse in my pocket a burglar I had become, and I felt no more repugnance to the business than I did to that of the architect. Notwithstanding the natural masculine interest these young ladies stirred in me, I meant to wait till they had separated—gone to bed—and fallen asleep. Then I would slip out from my hiding-place, swipe the brooch or the chain that had been thrown on the desk, and go.

"What was the matter with the first man?" Elsie began again.

"I don't know whether it was the matter with him or with me. I didn't trust him."

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"I should say that was the matter with him. And the next man?"

"Nothing. I simply couldn't have lived with him."

"And what's wrong with Stephen is that he's no more than very nice. I see."

"Oh no, you don't see, dear! There's a lot more to it than all that, only I can't explain it." I fancied that she wheeled round in her chair and faced her companion. "The long and short of it is that I've never met the man with whom I could keep house. I can fall in love with them for a while—I can have them going and coming—I can welcome them and say good-by to them—but when it's a question of all welcome and no good-by—well, the man's got to be different from any I've seen yet."

"You'll end by not getting any one at all."

"Which, from my point of view, don't you see, won't be an unmixed evil. Having lived happily for twenty-three years without a husband, I don't see why I should throw away a perfectly good bone for the most enticing shadow that ever was."

"I don't believe you're human." Before there could be a retort to this Elsie went on to ask, "How did poor Stephen take it?"

"Well, he didn't go into fits of laughter. He took it more or less lying down. If he hadn't—"

"If he hadn't—what?"

"Oh, I don't know. The least little bit of fight on his part—or even contempt—"

As this sentence remained unfinished I could hear Elsie rise.

"Well, I'm off to bed," she yawned. "What time do you have breakfast?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

There was some little discussion of household arrangements, after which they said their good nights.

With Elsie's departure I began for the first time to be uncomfortable. I can't express myself otherwise than to say that as long as she was there I felt I had a chaperon. In spite of the fact that I had become a professional burglar the idea of being left alone with an innocent young lady in her bedroom filled me with dismay.

I was almost on the point of making a bolt for it when I heard Elsie call out from the hallway: "Ugh! How dark and poky! For mercy's sake, come up with me!"

Miss Barry lingered at the dressing-table long enough to ask: "Wouldn't you rather sleep in mother's room? That communicates with this, with only a little passage in between. The bed is made up."

"Oh no," Elsie's staccato came back. "I don't mind being up there, and my things are spread out; only it seems so creepy to climb all those stairs."

"Wait a minute."

She sprang up. I breathed freely. My sense of propriety was saved. The voices were receding along the front hall. Once the young ladies had begun to mount the stairs I would slip out by the back hall and get off. Relaxing my hold on the silk hangings I stepped out cautiously.

My first thought was for the objects I had heard thrown down with a rattle on the writing-desk. They proved to be a string of small pearls, a diamond pin, and some rings of which I made no inspection before sweeping them all into my pocket.

I was ready now to steal away, but, to my vexation, the incorrigible maidens had begun to talk love-affairs again at the foot of the staircase leading up to the third

THE CITY OF COMRADES

floor. They had also turned on the hall light, so that my chances were diminished for getting away unseen.

Knowing, however, that sooner or later they would have to go up the next flight, I stood by the writing-desk and waited. I was not nervous; I was not alarmed. As a matter of fact the success of my undertaking up to the present point, together with the action of food and wine, combined to make me excited and hilarious. I chuckled in advance over the mystification of Miss Regina Barry, who would find on returning to her room that her rings, her necklet, and her gold-mesh purse had melted into the atmosphere.

In sheer recklessness I was now guilty of a bit of deviltry before which I would have hesitated had I had time to give it a second thought. On the desk there was a scrap of blank paper and a pen. Stooping, I printed in the neat block letters I had once been accustomed to inscribe below a plan:

There are men different from those you have seen hitherto. Wait.

This I pinned to the pincushion on the dressing-table, beginning at once to creep toward the door, so as to seize the first opportunity of slipping down the back stairs.

But again I was frustrated.

"I'm all right now," I heard Elsie say, reassuringly. "Don't come up. Go back and go to bed."

Miss Barry spoke as she returned along the hall toward her room: "The cook sleeps in the next room to you, so that if you're afraid in the night you've only to hammer on the wall. But you needn't be. This house is as safe as a prison."

I had barely time to get into the bay window again and pull the curtains to.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

Some five minutes followed, during which I heard the opening and shutting of drawers and closets and the swish and frou-frou of skirts. I began to curse my idiocy in fastening that silly bit of writing to the pincushion. My only hope lay in the possibility that she would go to bed and to sleep without seeing it.

With hearing grown extraordinarily acute I could trace every movement she made about the room. Presently I knew she had come back to the dressing-table again. Pulling up a chair, she sat down before it, to finish, I suppose, the arranging of her hair.

For a few seconds there was a silence, during which I could hear the thumping of my heart. Then came the faint rattling of paper. I knew when she read the thing by the slight catch in her breath. I expected more than that. I thought she would call out to her friend or otherwise give an alarm. If she went to a telephone to summon the police I decided to make a dash for it. Indeed, I meant to make a dash for it as it was, as soon as I knew her next move.

But of all the next moves, the one she made was the one I had least counted on. With a sudden tug at the hangings she pulled them apart—and I was before her.

I was before her and she was before me. It is this latter detail of which I have the most vivid recollection. In the matter of time all other recollections of the moment seem to come after that and to be subsidiary to it.

My immediate impression was of two enormous, wonderful, burning eyes, full of amazement. Apart from the eyes I hardly saw anything. It was as if the light of a dark lantern had been suddenly turned on me and I was blinded by the blaze. I was blinded by the blaze and

THE CITY OF COMRADES

shriveled up in it. No words can do justice to my sudden sense of being a contemptible, loathsome reptile.

"Sh!" was the first sound that came from her. She raised her hand. "Don't make a noise or you'll frighten my friend. She's nervous already."

Instinctively I pulled off my cap, stepping out of my hiding-place into the middle of the room. As I did so she recoiled, supporting herself by a hand on the writing-desk. Now that the discovery was made, I could see her grow pale, while the hand on the desk trembled.

"You mustn't be afraid," I began to whisper.

"I'm not afraid," she whispered back; "but—but what are you doing here?"

"I'll show you," I returned, with shamefaced quietness. "I shall also show you that if you'll let me go without giving an alarm you won't be sorry."

Pulling all the things I had stolen out of my pocket, I showered them on the dressing-table.

"Oh!"

The smothered exclamation made it plain to me that she hadn't missed the articles.

"May I ask you to verify them?" I went on. "If you should find later that something had disappeared, I shouldn't like you to think that I had carried it away."

She made a feint at examining the jewelry, but I could see that she was incapable of making anything like a count. It was I who insisted on going over the objects one by one.

"There's this," I said, touching the gold-mesh purse, but not picking it up. "I see there's money in it; but it has not been opened. Then there's this," I added, indicating the pearl necklet; "and this," which was the

THE CITY OF COMRADES

brooch. "The rings," I continued, "I don't know anything about. There are three here. That's all I remember seeing; but I didn't notice in particular."

She said, in a breathless whisper, "That's all there were."

"Then may I ask if you mean to let me go?"

"How can I stop you?"

"Oh, in two or three ways. You could call your servants, or you could ring up the police—"

Her big, burning eyes were fixed on me hypnotically. The color began to come back to her cheeks, but she trembled still.

"How—how did you get in?"

I explained to her.

"And the only thing I've taken," I went on, "is the food I ate and the wine I drank; but if you knew how much I needed them—"

"Were you hungry?"

"I hadn't eaten anything for two days, and very little for two days before that."

"Then you're not—you're not one of those gentleman burglars who do this sort of thing out of bravado?"

"As we see in novels or plays. I don't think you'll find many of them about. I'm a burglar," I pursued, "or I—I meant to be one—but I'm not a gentleman."

"You speak like a gentleman."

"Unfortunately, a gentleman is not made by speech. A gentleman could never be in the predicament in which you've caught me."

"Well, then, you were a gentleman once."

"My father was a gentleman—and is."

"English?"

"I'd rather not tell you. Now that I've restored the

THE CITY OF COMRADES

things, if you'll give me your word that I sha'n't be molested I shall—"

"You sha'n't be molested, only—"

As she hesitated I insisted, "Only what, may I ask?"

Her manner was a mixture of embarrassment and pity. She had not hitherto taken her eyes from me since we had begun to speak. Now she let them wander away; or, rather, she let them shift away, to return to me swiftly, as if she couldn't trust me without watching me. By this time she was trembling so violently, too, that she was obliged to grasp the back of a chair to steady herself. She was too little to be tall, and yet too tall to be considered little. The filmy thing she wore, with its long, loose sleeves, gave her some of the appearance of an angel, only that no angel ever had this bright, almost hectic color in the cheeks, and these scarlet lips.

"Was it," she asked, speaking, as we both did, in low tones, and rapidly—"was it because you—you had no money that you did this?"

I smiled faintly. "That was it exactly; but now—"

"Then won't you let me give you some?"

I still had enough of the man about me to straighten myself up and say: "Thanks, no. It's very kind of you; but—but the reasons which make it impossible for me to—to steal it make it equally impossible for me to take it as a gift."

"But why—why was it impossible for you to steal it, when you had come here to do it?"

"I suppose it was seeing the owner of it face to face. I'd sunk low enough to steal from some one I couldn't visualize—but what's the use? It's mere hair-splitting. Just let me say that this is my first attempt, and it hasn't

THE CITY OF COMRADES

succeeded. I may do better next time if I can get up the nerve."

"Oh, but there won't be a next time."

"That we shall have to see."

"Suppose"—the mixture of embarrassment and pity made it hard for her to speak—"suppose I said I was sorry for you."

"You don't have to say it. I see it. It's something I shall never forget as long as I live."

"Well, since I'm sorry for you, won't you let me—?"

"No," I interrupted, firmly. "I'm grateful for your pity; I'll accept that; but I won't take anything else." I began moving toward the door. "Since you're good enough to let me go, I had better be off; but I can't do it without thanking you."

For the first time she smiled a little. Even in that dim light I could see it was what in normal conditions would be commonly called a generous smile, full, frank, and kindly. Just now it was little more than a quivering of the long scarlet lips. She glanced toward the little heap of things on the desk.

"If it comes to that, I have to thank you."

I raised my hand deprecatingly.

"Don't."

I had almost reached the threshold when her words made me turn.

"Do you know who I am?"

"I think I do," was all I could reply.

"Well, then, why shouldn't you come back later—in some more usual manner—and let me see if there isn't something I could do for you?"

"Do for me in what way?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"In the way of getting you work—or something."

My heart had leaped up for a minute, but now it fell. Why it should have done either I cannot say, since I could be nothing to her but a fool who had tried to be a thief, and couldn't, as we say in our common idiom, get away with it.

I thanked her again.

"But you've done a great deal for me as it is," I added. "I couldn't ask for more." Somewhat disconnectedly I continued, "I think you're the pluckiest girl I ever saw not to have been afraid of me."

"Oh, it wasn't pluck. I saw at once that you wouldn't do me any harm."

"How?"

"In general. I was surprised. I was excited. In a way I was overcome. But I wasn't afraid of you. If you'd been a tramp or a colored man or anything like that it would have been different. But one isn't afraid of a—of a gentleman."

"But I'm not a—"

"Well then, a man who has a gentleman's traditions. You'd better go now," she whispered, suddenly. "If you want to come back as I've suggested—any time tomorrow forenoon—I'd speak to my father—"

"Not about this?" I whispered, hurriedly.

"No, not about this. This had better be just between ourselves. I shall never say anything to any one about it, and I advise you to do the same." I had made a low bow, preparatory to getting out, when she held up the scrap of paper she had crumpled in her hand. "Why did you write this?"

But I got out of the room without giving a reply.

I was descending the back stairs when I heard a door

THE CITY OF COMRADES

open on the third floor and Elsie's voice call out, "Regina, are you talking to anybody down there?"

There was a tremor in the mezzo as it replied: "N-no. I'm just—I'm just moving about."

"Well, for Heaven's sake go to bed! It's after two o'clock. I never was in a house like this in all my life before. It seems to be full of people crawling round everywhere. I think I'll come down to your mother's bed, after all."

"Do," was the only word I heard as I stole into the servants' dining-room, then into the closet with shelves, where I shut the door softly. A few seconds later I was out on the cool ground, in the dark, behind the shrub.

I lay there almost breathlessly, not because I was unable to get up, but because I couldn't drag myself away. I wanted to go over the happenings of the last hour and seal them in my memory. They were both terrible to me and beautiful.

I had been there some fifteen minutes when I heard the open window above me closed gently and the fastening snapped. I knew that again she was near me, though, as before, she didn't suspect my presence. I wondered if the chances of life would ever bring us so close to each other again.

Above me, where the shrub detached itself a little from the wall of the house, I could see the stars. Lying on my back, with my head pillowed on the crook of my arm, I watched them till it seemed to me they began to pale. At the same time I caught a thinning in the texture of the darkness. I got up with the silence in which I had lain down. Crossing the brick-paved yard and striding over the low wall, I was again in the vacant lot.

It was not yet dawn, but it was the dark-gray hour

THE CITY OF COMRADES

which tells that dawn is coming. I was obliged to take more accurate precautions than before, as, crushing the tangle of nettle, burdock, fireweed, and blue succory, I crept along in the shadow of the house wall to regain the empty street.

CHAPTER III

THE city was beginning to wake. Mysterious carts and wagons rumbled along the neighboring avenues. From a parallel street came the buzz and clang of a lonely early-morning electric car. Running footsteps would have startled one if they had not been followed by the clinking of peaceful milk-bottles in back yards. Clanking off into the distance one heard the tread of solitary pedestrians bent on errands that stirred the curiosity. Here and there the lurid flames of torches lit up companies of gnomelike men digging in the roadways.

Going toward Greeley's Slip, I skirted the Park, though it made the walk longer. Under the dark trees men were lying on benches and on the grass, but for reasons I couldn't yet analyze I refused to thrust myself among them. A few hours earlier I would have done this without thinking, as without fear; but something had happened to me that now made any such course impossible.

My immediate need was to get back to poor old Lovey and lie down by his side. That again was beyond my power to analyze. I suppose it was something like a homing instinct, and Lovey was all there was to welcome me.

"Is that you, sonny?" he asked, sleepily, as I stooped to creep into the cubby-hole which a chance arrangement of planks made in a pile of lumber.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Yes, Lovey."

"Glad ye've come."

When I had stretched myself out I felt him snuggle a little nearer me.

"You don't mind, sonny, do you?"

"No, Lovey. It's all right. Go to sleep again."

For myself, I could do nothing but lie and watch the coming of the dawn. I could see it beating itself into the darkness long before there was anything to which one could give the name of light. It was like a succession of great cosmic throbs, after each of which the veil was a little more translucent.

In my nostrils was the sweet, penetrating smell of lumber, subtly laden with the memories of the days when I was a boy. The Canadian differs from the American largely, I think, in the closeness of his forest-and-farm associations. Not that the American hasn't the farm and the forest, too, but he has moved farther away from them. The mill, the factory, and the office have supplanted them—in imagination when not in fact, and in fact when not in imagination. If the woods call him he has to go to them—for a week, or two, or three at a time; but he comes back inevitably to a life in which the woods play little part. The Canadian never leaves that life. The primeval still enters into his cities and his thoughts. Some day it may be different; but as yet he is the son of rivers, lakes, and forests. There is always in him a strain of the *voyageur*. The true Canadian never ceases to smell balsam or to hear the lapping of water on wild shores.

It was balsam that I smelled now. The lapping of water soothed me as the river, too, began to wake. It woke with a faint noise of paddle-wheels, followed by a bellow like the call of some sea monster to its mate.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

Right below me and close to the slip I heard the measured dip of oars. Hoarse calls of men, from deck to deck or from deck to dock, had a weird, watchful sound, as though the darkness were peopled with Flying Dutchmen. Lights glided up and down the river—which itself remained unseen—mostly gold lights, but now and then a colored one. Chains of lights fringed the New Jersey shore, where, far away, sleepless factories threw up dim red flares. A rising southeast wind not only hid the stars under banks of clouds, but went whistling eerily round the corners of the lumber-piles. The scent of pine, and all the pungent, nameless odors of the riverside, began to be infused with the smell—if it is a smell—of coming rain.

I can best describe myself as in a kind of trance in which past and present were merged into one, and in which there seemed to be no period when two wonderful, burning eyes had not been watching me in pity and amazement. As long as I lived I knew they would watch me still. In their light I got my life's significance. In their light I saw myself as a boy again, with a boy's vision of the future. The smell of lumber carried me back to our old summer home on the banks of the Ottawa, where I had had my dreams of what I should do when I was big. All boys being patriotic, they were dreams not merely of myself, but of my country. It worried me that it was not sufficiently on the great world map, that apart from its lakes and prairies and cataracts it had no wonders to show mankind. As we were a traveling family, I was accustomed to wonders in other countries, and easily annoyed when one set of cousins in New York and another in England took it for granted that we lived in an Ultima Thule of snow. I meant to show them the contrary.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

From the beginning my ardors and indignations translated themselves into stone. I had seen St. Peter's in one country, St. Paul's in another, and Chartres and châteaux in a third. I had seen New York transforming itself under my very eyes—the change began when I was in my teens—into a town of prodigious towers which in themselves were symbolical. Then I would go home to a red-gray city, marvelously placed between river and mountain, where any departure from its original French austerity was likely to be in the direction of the exuberant, the unchastened, the fantastic. All new buildings in Canada, as in most of the States, lacked "school."

"School" was, more or less in secret, the preoccupation of my youth—"school" with some such variation from traditional classic lines as would create or stimulate the indigenous. I had not yet learned what New York was to teach me later—that necessity was the mother of art, and that pure new styles were formed not by any one's ingenuity or by the caprice of changing taste, but because human needs demanded them. Rejecting the art nouveau, which later made its permanent home in Germany, I combined all the lines in which great buildings had ever been designed, from the Doric to the Georgian, in the hope of evolving a type which the world would recognize as distinctively Canadian, and to which I should give my name. In imagination I built castles, cathedrals and theaters, homes, hotels and offices. They were in the style to be known as Melburyesque, and would draw students from all parts of the architectural earth to Montreal.

It was not an unworthy dream, and even if I could never have worked it out I might have made of it something of which not wholly to be ashamed. But as early

THE CITY OF COMRADES

as before I went to the Beaux Arts the curse of Canada—the curse, more or less, of all northern peoples—began to be laid upon me. In Paris I had some respite from it, but almost as soon as I had hung out my shingle at home I was suffering again from its cravings. I will not say that I put up no fight, but I put up no fight commensurate with the evil I had to face. The result was what I have told you, and for which I now had to suffer in my soul the most scorching form of recompense.

The point I found it difficult to decide was as to whether or not I ever wanted to see Regina Barry again—or whether I had it in me to go back and show myself to her in the state from which I had fallen more than three years before. In the end it was that possibility alone which enabled me to endure the real coming of the dawn.

For it came—this new day which out of darkness might be bringing me a new life.

As I lay with my face turned toward the west I got none of its first glories. Even on a cloudy morning, with a spattering of rain, I knew there must be splendors in the east, if no more than gray and lusterless splendors. Light to a gray world is as magical as hope to a gray heart; and as I watched the lamps on the New Jersey heights grow wan, while the river unbared its bosom to the day, that thing came to me which makes disgrace and shame and humiliation and every other ingredient of remorse a remedy rather than a poison.

I myself was hardly aware of the fact till Lovey and I had crept out of our cubby-hole, because all round us men were going to work. Sleepers in the open generally rise with daylight, but we had kept longer than usual to our refuge because we didn't want to fare forth into the rain. As sooner or later it would come to a choice between

THE CITY OF COMRADES

going out and being kicked out, we decided to move of our own accord.

I must leave to your imagination the curious sensation of the down and out in having nothing to do but to get up, shake themselves, and walk away. On waking after each of these homeless nights it had seemed to me that the necessity for undressing to go to bed and dressing when one got up in the morning was the primary distinction between being a man and being a mere animal. Not to have to undress just to dress again reduced one to the level of the horse. Stray dogs got up and went off to their vague leisure just as Lovey and I were doing. Not to wash, not to go to breakfast, not to have a duty when washing and breakfasting were done—knocked out from under one all the props that civilization had built up and deprived one of the right to call oneself a man.

I think it was this last consideration that had most weight with me as Lovey and I stood gazing at the multifarious activities of the scene. There were men in sight, busy with all kinds of occupations. They were like ants; they were like bees. They came and went and pulled and hauled and hammered and climbed and dug, and every man's eyes seemed bent on his task as if it were the only one in the world.

"It means two or three dollars a day to 'em if they ain't," Lovey grunted, when I had pointed this fact out to him. "Don't suppose they'd work if they didn't 'ave to, do ye?"

"I dare say they wouldn't. But my point is that they do work. It's Emerson who says that every man is as lazy as he dares to be, isn't it?"

"Oh, anybody could say that."

"And in spite of the fact that they'd rather be lazy,

THE CITY OF COMRADES

they're all doing something. Look at them. Look at them in every direction to which your eyes can turn—droves of them, swarms of them, armies of them—every one bent on something into which he is putting a piece of himself!"

"Well, they've got 'omes or boardin'-'ouses. It's easy enough to git a job when ye can give an address. But when ye carn't—"

We were to test that within a minute or two. Fifteen or twenty brownies were digging in a ditch. Of all the forms of work in sight it seemed that which demanded the least in the way of special training.

Approaching a fiercely mustachioed man of clearly defined nationality, I said, "Say, boss, could you give my buddy and me a job?"

Rolling toward me a pair of eyes that would have done credit to a bandit in an opera, he emitted sounds which I can best transcribe as, "Where d'live?"

"That's the trouble," I answered, truthfully. "We don't live anywhere and we should like to."

He looked us over. "Beat it," he commanded, nodding toward the central quarters of the city.

"But, boss," I pleaded, "my buddy and I haven't got a quarter between us."

He pointed with his thumb over his left shoulder. "Getta out."

"We haven't got a nickel," I insisted; "we haven't got a cent."

"Cristoforo, ca' da cop."

As Cristoforo sprang from the ditch to look for a policeman, Lovey and I shuffled off again into the rain.

We stood for a minute at the edge of one of the long, sordid avenues where a sordid life was surging up and

THE CITY OF COMRADES

down. Men, women, and children of all races and nearly all ranks were hurrying to and fro, each bent on an errand. It was the fact that life provided an errand for each of them that suddenly struck me as the most wonderful thing in creation. There was no one so young or so old, no one so ignorant or so alien, that he was not going from point to point with a special purpose in view. Among the thousands and the tens of thousands who would in the course of the morning pass the spot on which we stood, there would probably not be one who hadn't dressed, washed, and breakfasted as a return for his daily contribution to the common good. Never before and hardly ever since did I have such a sense of life's infinite and useful complexity. There was no height to which it didn't go up; there was no depth to which it didn't go down. No one was left out but the absolute wastrel like myself, who couldn't be taken in.

Though it was not a cold day, the steadiness of the drizzle chilled me. The dampness of the pavements got through the worn soles of my boots, and I suppose it did the same with Lovey's. The lack of food made the old man white, and that of drink set him to trembling. The fact that he hadn't shaved for the past day or two gave his sodden face a grisly look that was truly appalling. Though the pale-blue eyes were extinct, as if the spirit in them had been quenched, they were turned toward me with the piteous appeal I had sometimes seen in those of a blind dog.

It was for me to take the lead, and yet I couldn't wholly see in what direction to take it. While I was pondering, Lovey made a variety of suggestions.

"There doesn't seem to be nothink for it, sonny, but to go and repent for a day or two. I 'ate to do it; kind

THE CITY OF COMRADES

o' deceivin' like, it is; but they'll let us dry ourselves and give us a feed if we 'ave a sense of sin."

I wondered if he had in mind anything better than what I had myself.

"Where?"

He took the negative side first.

"We couldn't go to the Saviour, because I've put it over on 'em twice this year already. And the 'Omeless Men won't do nothink for ye onless you make it up in menial work."

"I won't try either of them," I said, briefly.

"Don't blame you, sonny, not a bit. Kind o' makes a hypocrite of a man, it does. I 'ate to be a hypocrite, only when I can't 'elp it."

He went on to enumerate other agencies for the raising of the fallen, of most of which he had tested the hospitality during the past few years. I rejected them as he named them, one by one. To this rejection Lovey subscribed with the unreasoning dislike all outcast men feel for the hand stretched down to them from higher up. Nothing but starvation would have forced him to any of these thresholds; and for me even starvation would not work the miracle.

"What's the matter with the Down and Out?" I sprang on him, suddenly.

He groaned. "Oh, sonny! It's just—just what I was afear'd of."

I turned and looked down into his poor, bleared, suffering old face.

"Why?"

"Because—because—oncet ye try that they'll—they'll never let ye go."

"But suppose you don't want them to let you go?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

He backed away from me. If the dead eyes could waken to expression, they did it then.

"Oh, sonny!" He shook as if palsied. "Ye don't know 'em, my boy. I've summered and wintered 'em—by lookin' on. I've had pals of my own—"

"And what are they doing now, those pals of your own?"

"God knows; I don't. Yes, I do; some of 'em. I see 'em round, goin' to work as reg'lar as reg'lar, and no more spunk in 'em than in a goldfish when ye shakes yer finger at their bowl."

Afraid of exciting suspicion by standing still, we began drifting with the crowd.

"Is there much that you can call spunk in you and me?"

Again he lifted those piteous, drunken eyes. "We're fellas together, ain't we? We're buddies. I 'ear ye say so yerself when you was speakin' to that Eyetalian."

I have to confess that with his inflection something warm crept into my cold heart. You have to be as I was to know what the merest crumbs of trust and affection mean. A dog as stray and homeless as myself might have been more to me; but since I had no dog . . .

"Yes, Lovey," I answered, "we're buddies, all right. But for that very reason don't you think we ought to try to help each other up?"

He stopped, to turn to me with hands crossed on his breast in a spirit of petition.

"But, sonny, you don't mean—you carn't mean—on—on the wagon?"

"I mean on anything that 'll get us out of this hell of a hole."

"Oh, well, if it's only that, I've—I've been in tighter places than this before—and—and look at me now.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

There's ways. Ye don't have to jump at nothink on-nat'el. If ye'd only 'ave listened to me yesterday—but it ain't too late even now. What about to-night? Just two old ladies—no violence—nothink that 'd let you in for nothink dishonorable."

"No, Lovey."

We drifted on again. He spoke in a tone of bitter reproach.

"Ye'd rather go to the Down and Out! It 'll be the down, all right, sonny; but there'll be no out to it. Ye'll be a prisoner. They'll keep at ye and at ye till yer soul won't be yer own. Now all these other places ye can put it over on 'em. They're mostly ladies and parsons and greenhorns that never 'ad no experience. A little repentance and they'll fall for it every time. Besides"—he turned to me with another form of appeal—"ye're a Christian, ain't ye? A little repentance now and then 'll do ye good. It's like something laid by for a rainy day. I've tried it, so I know. Ye're young, sonny. Ye don't understand. And when it 'll tide ye over a time like this—they'll git ye a job, very likely—and ye can backslide by and by when it's safe. Why, it's all as easy as easy."

"It isn't as easy as easy, Lovey, because you say you don't like it yourself."

"I like it better than the Down and Out, where they won't let ye backslide no more. Why, I was in at Stinson's one day and there was a chap there—Rollins was his name, a plumber—just enj'yin' of himself like—nothink wrong—and come to find out he'd been one of their men. Well, what do ye think, sonny? A fellow named Pyncheon blew in—awful 'ard drinker for a young 'and, he used to be—and he sat down beside Rollins and pled with 'im

THE CITY OF COMRADES

and plod with 'im, and—well, ye don't see Rollins round Stinson's no more. I tell ye, sonny, ye carn't put nothing over on 'em. They knows all the tricks and all the trade. Give me kind-'earted ladies; give me ministers of the gospel; give me the stool o' repentance two or three times a month; but don't give me fellas that because they've knocked off the booze theirselves wants every one else to knock it off, too, and don't let it be a free country."

We came to the corner to which I had been directing our seemingly aimless steps. It was a corner where the big red and green jars that had once been the symbols for medicines within now stood as a sign for soda-water and ice-cream.

"Let's go in here."

Lovey hung back. "What's the use of that? That ain't no saloon."

"Come on and let us try."

Pushing open the screen door, I made him pass in before me. We found ourselves in front of a white counter fitted up like a kind of bar. As a bar of any sort was better than none, Lovey's face took on a leaden shade of brightness.

In the way of a guardian all we could see at first was a white-coated back bent behind the counter. When it straightened up it was topped by a friendly, boyish face.

Lovey leaped back, pulling me by the arm.

"That's that very young Pyncheon I was a-tellin' you of," he whispered, tragically; "him what got Rollins, the plumber, out of Stinson's. Let's 'ook it, sonny! He won't do us no good."

But the boyish face had already begun to beam.

"Hel-lo, old sport! Haven't seen you in a pair of blue moons. Put it there!"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

The welcome was the more disconcerting because in the mirror behind Pyncheon I could see myself in contrast to his clean, young, manly figure. I have said I was shabby without being hideously so, but that was before I had slept a fourth night on the bare boards of a lumber-yard, to be drenched with rain in the morning. It was also before I had gone a fourth morning without shaving, and with nothing more thorough in the way of a wash than I could steal in a station lavatory. The want of food, the want of drink, to say nothing of the unspeakable anguish within, had stamped me, moreover, with something woebegone and spectral which, now that I saw it reflected in the daylight, shook me to the soul.

I never was so timid, apologetic, or shamefaced in my life as when I grasped the friendly hand stretched out to me across the counter. I had no smile to return to Pyncheon's. I had no courtesies to exchange. Not till that minute had I realized that I was outside the system of fellowship and manhood, and that even a handshake was a condescension.

"Pyn," I faltered, hoarsely, "I want you to take me to the Down and Out. Will you?"

"Sure I will!" He glanced at Lovey. "And I'll take old Lovikins, too."

"Don't you be so fresh with your names, young man!" Lovey spoke up, tartly. "'Tain't the first time I've seen you—"

"And I hope it won't be the last," Pyn laughed.

"That 'll depend on how polite ye're able to make yer-self."

"Oh, you can count me in on politeness, old sport, so long as you come to the Down and Out."

"I'll go to the Down and Out when I see fit. I ain't

THE CITY OF COMRADES

goin' to be dragged there by the 'air of the 'ead, as I see you drag poor Rollins, the plumber, a month or two ago."

"Quit your kiddin', Lovey. How am I going to drag you by the 'air of the 'ead when you're as bald as a door-knob? Say, you fellows," he went on, pulling one of the levers before him, "I'm going to start you off right now with a glass of this hot chocolate. The treat's on me. By the time you've swallowed it Milligan will be here, and I can get off long enough to take you over to Vandiver Street." He dashed in a blob of whipped cream. "Here, old son, this is for you; and there's more where it came from."

"I didn't come in 'ere for nothink of the kind," Lovey protested. "I didn't know we was comin' in 'ere at all. You take it, sonny."

"Go ahead, Lovikins," Mr. Pyncheon insisted. "'E's to 'ave a bigger one," he mimicked. "Awful good for the 'air of the 'ead. 'Ll make it sprout like an apple-tree—I beg your pardon, happple-tree—in May."

Before Pyncheon had finished, the primitive in poor Lovey had overcome both pride and reluctance, and the glass of chocolate was pretty well drained. The sight of his sheer animal avidity warned me not to betray myself. While Pyncheon explained to Milligan and made his preparations for conducting us, I carried my chocolate to the less important part of the shop, given up to the sale of tooth-brushes and patent medicines, to consume it at ease and with dignity.

Pyncheon having changed to a coat, in the buttonhole of which I noticed a little silver star, and a straw hat with a faint silver line in the hatband, we were ready to depart.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"I'll go with ye, sonny," Lovey explained; "but I ain't a-goin' to stay. No Down and Out for mine."

"You wouldn't leave me, Lovey?" I begged, as I replaced the empty glass on the counter. "I'm looking to you to help me to keep straight."

He edged up to me, laying a shaking hand on my arm.

"Oh, if it's that— But," he added more cheerfully, "we don't have to stay no longer than we don't want to. There's no law by which they can keep us ag'in' our will, there ain't."

"No, Lovey. If we want to go we'll go—but we're buddies, aren't we? And we'll stick by each other."

"Say, you fellows! Quick march! I've only got half an hour to get there and back."

Out in the street, Lovey and I hung behind our guide. He was too brisk and smart and clean for us to keep step with. Alone we could, as we phrased it, get by. With him the contrast called attention to the fact that we were broken and homeless men.

"You go ahead, Pyn—" I began.

"Aw, cut that out!" he returned, scornfully. "Wasn't I a worse looker than you, two and a half years ago? Old Colonel Straight picked me up from a bench in Madison Square—the very bench from which he'd been picked up himself—and dragged me down to Vandiver Street like a nurse 'll drag a boy that kicks like blazes every step of the way."

As we were now walking three abreast, with Pyn in the middle, I asked the question that was most on my mind:

"Was it hard, Pyn—cutting the booze out?"

"Sure it was hard! What do you think? You're not on the way to a picnic. For the first two weeks I fought like hell. If the other guys hadn't sat on my head—well,

THE CITY OF COMRADES

you and old Lovey wouldn't have had no glass of hot chocolate this morning."

"I suppose the first two weeks are the worst."

"And the best. If you're really out to put the job through you find yourself toughening to it every day."

"And you mean by being out to put the job through?"

"Wanting to get the durned thing under you so as you can stand on it and stamp it down. Booze 'll make two kinds of repenters, and I guess you guys stand for both. Old Lovey here"—he pinched my companion's arm—"he'll forsake his bad habits just long enough to get well fed up, a clean shirt on his back, and his nerves a bit quieted down. But he'll always be looking forward to the day when he'll be tempted again, and thinking of the good time he'll have when he falls."

"If you'll mind yer own business, young Pyn—" Lovey began, irritably.

"Then there's another kind," this experienced reformer went on, imperturbably, "what 'll have a reason for cutting the blasted thing out, like he'd cut out a cancer or anything else that 'll kill him. I've always known you was that kind, Slim, and I told you so nearly a year ago."

"I seen ye," Lovey put in. "Was speakin' about it only yesterday. Knew you was after no good. I warned ye, didn't I, Slim?"

Curiosity prompted me to say, "What made you think I had a motive for getting over it?"

"Looks. You can always tell what a man's made for by the kind of looker he is. As a looker you're some swell. Lovikins here, now—"

"If I can't do as well as the likes o' you, ye poor little snipe of a bartender for babies—"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"What 'll you bet you can't?" Pyn asked, good-naturedly.

"I ain't a bettin' man, but I can show!"

"Well, you show, and I'll lay fifty cents against you. You'll be umpire, Slim, and hold the stakes. Is that a go?"

"I don't 'ave no truck o' that kind," Lovey declared, loftily. "I'm a doer, I am—when I get a-goin'. I don't brag beforehand—not like some."

I was still curious, however, about myself.

"And what did you make out of my looks, Pyn?"

He stopped, stood off, and eyed me.

"Do you know what you're like now?"

"I know I'm not like anything human."

"You're like a twenty-dollar bill that's been in every pawnshop, and every bar, and every old woman's stocking, and every old bum's pocket, and is covered with dirt and grease and microbes till you wouldn't hardly hold it in your hand; but it's still a twenty-dollar bill—that 'll buy twenty dollars' worth every time—and whenever you like you can get gold for it."

"Thank you, Pyn," I returned, humbly, as we went on our way again. "That's the whitest thing that has ever been said to me."

Before we reached Vandiver Street, Pyn had given us two bits of information, both of which I was glad to receive.

One was entirely personal, being a brief survey of his fall and rise. The son of a barber in one of the small towns near New York, he had gone to work with a druggist on leaving the high school. His type, as he described it, had been from the beginning that of the cheap sport. Cheap sports had been his companions, and before he

THE CITY OF COMRADES

was twenty-one he had married a pretty manicure girl from his father's establishment. He had married her while on a spree, and after the spree had repented. Repenting chiefly because he wasn't earning enough to keep a wife, he threw the blame for his mistake on her. When a baby came he was annoyed; when a second baby came he was desperate; when a third baby promised to appear he was overwhelmed. Since the expenses of being a cheap sport couldn't be reduced, he saw no resource but flight to New York, leaving his wife to fend for herself and her children.

Folly having made of him a hard drinker, remorse made of him a harder one. And since no young fellow of twenty-four is callous enough to take wife-desertion with an easy conscience, my own first talks with him had been filled with maudlin references to a kind of guilt I hadn't at the time understood. All I knew was that from bad he had gone to worse, and from worse he was on the way to the worst of all, when old Colonel Straight rescued him.

The tale of that rescue unfolded some of the history of the Down and Out. As to that, Pyn laid the emphasis on the fact that the club was not a mission—that is, it was not the effort of the safe to help those who are in danger; it was the effort of those who are in danger to help themselves. Built up on unassisted effort, it was self-respecting. No bribes had ever been offered it, and no persuasions but such as a man who has got out of hell can bring to bear on another who is still frying in the fire. Its action being not from the top downward, but from the bottom upward, it had a native impulse to expansion.

Its inception had been an accident. Two men who had first met as Pyncheon and I had first met had lost sight of each other for several years. At a time when each

THE CITY OF COMRADES

had worked his salvation out they had come together by accident on Broadway, and later had by another accident become responsible for a third. Finding him one night lying on the pavement of a lonely street, they had seemingly had no choice but to pick him up and carry him to a cheap but friendly hostelry which they knew would not refuse him. Here they had kept him till he had sobered up and taken the job they found for him. Watching over him for months, they finally had the pleasure of restoring him to his wife and seeing a broken home put on its feet again. This third man, in gratitude for what had been done for him, went after a fourth, and the fourth after a fifth, and so the chain was flung out. By the time their number had increased to some twenty-five or thirty Providence offered them a dwelling-place.

The dwelling-place, with the few apparently worthless articles it contained, was all the club had ever accepted as a gift. Even that might have been declined had it not been for the fact that it was going begging. When old Miss Smedley died it was found that she had left her residence in Vandiver Place as a legacy to St. David's Church, across the way. She had left it, however, as an empty residence. As an empty residence it was in a measure a white elephant on the hands of a legatee that had no immediate use for it.

St. David's Church, you will remember, was not now the fashionable house of prayer it had been in its early days. Time was when Vandiver Place was the heart of exclusive New York. In the 'forties and 'fifties no section of the city had been more select. In the 'sixties and 'seventies, when Doctor Grace was rector of St. David's, it had become time-honored. In the 'eighties and 'nineties the old families began to move up-town and the boarding-

THE CITY OF COMRADES

houses to creep in; and in the early years of the twentieth century the residents ceded the ground entirely to the manufacturer of artificial flowers and the tailor of the ready-to-wear. In 1911 the line of houses that made it a cul-de-sac was torn down and a broad thoroughfare cut through a congeries of slums, the whole being named Vandiver Street. Vandiver Place was gone; and with it went Miss Smedley.

Rufus Legrand, who succeeded Doctor Grace as rector of St. David's, offered Miss Smedley's house as a home for the Down and Out; but it was Beady Lamont, a husky furniture-mover and ardent member of the club, who suggested this philanthropic opportunity to Rufus Legrand.

"Say, reverent, my buddy's give in at last, on'y I haven't got no place to put him. But, say, reverent, there's that old house I helped to move the sticks out of two or three months ago. There's three beds left in it, and a couple of chairs. Me and him could bunk there for a few nights, while he got straightened out, and—"

"But you'd have no bedclothes."

"Say, reverent, we don't want no bedclothes. Sleepin' in the Park 'll learn you how to do without sheets."

"My daughter, Mrs. Ralph Coningsby, could undoubtedly supply you with some."

"Say, reverent, that ain't our way. We don't pass the buck on no one. What we haven't got we do without till we can pay for it ourselves. But that old house ain't doin' nothing but sit on its haunches; and if I could just get Tiger into the next bed to mine at night—we don't want no bedclothes nor nothing but what we lay down in—and take him along with me when I go to work by day, so as to keep my search-lights on him, like—"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

Rufus Legrand had already sufficiently weighed the proposal.

"I'm sure I don't see why you shouldn't sleep in the old place as long as you like, Beady, if you can only make yourselves comfortable."

"Say, reverent, now you're shouting."

So another accident settled the fate of Miss Smedley's lifelong home; and before many weeks the Down and Out was in full possession.

It was in full possession of the house with the refuse the heirs had not considered good enough to take away—three iron bedsteads that the servants had used; an equal number of humble worn-out mattresses; two tolerably solid wooden chairs, three that needed repairs, which were speedily given them; some crockery more or less chipped and cracked; and a stained steel-engraving of Franklin in the *salon* of Marie Antoinette.

True to its principles, the club accepted neither gifts of money nor contributions in kind. Its members were all graduates of the school of doing without. To those who came there a roof over the head was a luxury, while to have a friend to stand by them and care whether they went to the devil or not was little short of a miracle.

But by the time Billy Pyncheon had been brought in by old Colonel Straight, gratitude, sacrifice, and enthusiasm on the part of one or another of the members had adequately fitted up this house to which Lovey and I were on the way. It had become, too, the one institution of which the saloon-keepers of my acquaintance were afraid. We were all afraid of it. It had worked so many wonders among our pals that we had come to look on it as a home of the necromantic. Missions of any kind we knew how to cope with; but in the Down and Out there

THE CITY OF COMRADES

was a sort of wizardry that tamed the wildest hearts among us, cast out devils, and raised the nearly dead. I myself for a year or more—ever since I had seen the spell it had wrought on Pyn, for whom from the first I had felt a sympathy—had been haunted by the dread of it; and here I was at the door.

The door when we got to it was something of a disappointment. It was at the head of a flight of old-time brownstone steps, and was just like any other door. About it was nothing of the magical or cabalistic Lovey and I had been half expecting.

More impressive was the neat little man who opened to our ring. He was a wan, wistful, smiling little figure of sixty-odd, on whom all the ends of the world seemed to have come. He was like a man who has been dead and buried and has come to life again—but who shows he has been dead. If I had to look like that . . .

But I took comfort in the thought of Pyn. Pyn showed nothing. He was like one of the three holy men who went through Nebuchadnezzar's furnace—the smell of fire had not passed on him. A heartier, healthier, merrier fellow it would have been difficult to find.

He entered now with the air of authority which belongs to the member of a club.

"Fellows had their breakfast, Spender?"

Spender was all welcome, of the wistful, yearning kind.

"The men at work is gone; but the guys under restraint is still at table."

"Mr. Christian not here yet?"

"Never gets here before nine; and it's not half past seven yet."

Pyn turned to me. "Say, do you want to go in and feed, or will you wash up first, or go to bed, or what?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

With this large liberty of choice I asked if we could do whatever we liked. It was Spender who explained.

"That's the rule for new arrivals, unless they've got to be put under restraint at once."

"I don't want to be put under no restraint," Lovey declared, indignantly.

"That 'll be all right," Spender replied, kindly, "unless there's vermin—"

Lovey jumped.

"See here, now! Don't you begin no such immodest talk to me."

"There, there, Lovikins," Pyn broke in. "Spender don't mean no harm. All sorts have to come to a place like this. But when we see a gentleman we treat him like a gentleman. All Spender wants to know is this, Is it eats for you first, or a bath?"

"And I don't want no bath," Lovey declared, proudly.

"Then it 'll be eats. Quick march! I've got to beat it back to my job."

Pyn's introduction of us to those already in the dining-room was simple.

"This is Lovey. This is Slim. You guys 'll make 'em feel at home."

Making us feel at home consisted in moving along the table so as to give us room. In words there was no response to Pyn, who withdrew at once, nor was there more than a cursory inspection of us with the eyes. Whatever was kindly was in the atmosphere, and that was perceptible.

As we sat before two empty places, one of our new companions rose, went to the dresser behind us, and brought us each a plate, a spoon, a knife, and a cup and saucer. A big man went to the kitchen door and in a voice like thunder called out, "Mouse!"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

By the time he had returned to his place a stumpy individual with a big red mustache and a limp appeared on the threshold. An explanation of the summons was given him when a third of our friends pointed at us with a spoonful of oatmeal porridge before he put it in his mouth.

Mouse withdrew into the kitchen, coming back with two basins of porridge, which he placed, steaming hot, before us. Presently, too, he filled our cups with coffee. Bread and butter, sugar and milk, were all on the table. The meal went on in silence, except for the smacking of lips and the clinking of spoons on the crockeryware.

Of our fellow-guests I can only say that they presented different phases of the forlorn. The man next to me was sallow, hatchet-faced, narrow-breasted, weak of physique, and looked as if he might have been a tailor. His hair was a shock of unkempt black curls, and his dark eyes the largest and longest and most luminous I ever saw in a man. In their nervous glance they made me think of a horse's eyes, especially when he rolled them toward me timidly.

Opposite was a sandy, freckled-face type, whom I easily diagnosed as a Scotchman. Light hair, light eyebrows, and a heavy reddish mustache set off a face scored with a few deep wrinkles, and savage like that of a beast fretted with a sense of helplessness. The shaking hand that passed the bread to me was muscular, freckled, and covered with coarse, reddish hairs. I put him down as a gardener.

At the head of the table was a huge, unwieldy fellow who looked as if he had all run to fat, but who, as I afterward learned, was a mass of muscle and sinew, like a Japanese wrestler. He had bloated cheeks and bloated hands, and a voice so big and bass that when he spoke,

THE CITY OF COMRADES

as he did on going to the door to summon Mouse, he almost shook the dishes on the dresser. He proved to be, too, a pal of Beady Lamont's, and as a piano-mover by profession he frequented Beady's spheres.

At the big man's right was a poor little whippersnapper, not more than five foot two, who looked as if a puff would blow him away; and opposite him a tall, spare, fine-looking Irishman, a hospital attendant, whose face would have been full of humor had it not been convulsed for the time being with a sense of mortal anguish. It was he who had brought us our dishes and took pains to see that our needs were supplied.

No more than any of the others were we eager for conversation. The fact that we were having good warm food served in a more or less regular way was enough to occupy all that was uppermost in our thoughts. Poor Lovey ate as he had drunk the chocolate half an hour before, with a greed that was almost terrible. Once more I might have done the same had I not taken his example as a warning. Not that anything I did would have attracted attention in that particular gathering. Each man's gaze was turned inward. His soul's tragedy absorbed him to the exclusion of everything else. Reaction from the stupor of excess brought nothing but a sense of woe. There was woe on all faces. There would have been woe in all thoughts if conscious thought had not been outside the range of these drugged and stultified faculties.

What was more active than anything else was a blind fellow-feeling. They did little things for one another. They did little watchful things for Lovey and me. They even quarreled over their kindnesses like children eager to make themselves useful.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"You'll want to know where the barth-room is," the timid tailor said to me as we rose from the table. "I'll show you."

There was a snarl from the whippersnapper across the way.

"Aw, put your lid on, Headlights. How long have you been showin' barth-rooms in this here shebang?" He beckoned to me. "You come along o' me, Slim—"

It was the Irishman who intervened to keep the peace.

"Listen to Daisy now, will you? He's like a fox-terrier that owns the house and grounds and barks at every wan who goes by. Look now, Daisy! You take this ould gent up to the bath-room on the top floor; and you, Headlights, show Slim to the one on the second floor, and every wan o' you 'll have a bite at the cake."

With this peaceable division of the honors we started off.

I must describe the club as very humble. The rooms themselves, as was natural with an old New York residence, did not lack dignity. Though too narrow for their height, they had admirable cornices and some exquisite ceiling medallions. It is probable, too, that in days when there were no skyscrapers in the neighborhood the house was light enough, but now it wore a general air of dimness. The furnishings were just what you might have expected from the efforts of very poor men in giving of their small superfluity. There were plenty of plain wooden chairs, and a sufficiency of tables to match them. In the two down-stairs sitting-rooms, which must once have been Miss Smedley's front and back drawing-rooms, there were benches against the wall. A roll-top desk, which I learned was the official seat of Mr. Christian, was so placed as to catch the light from Vandiver Street. A

THE CITY OF COMRADES

plain, black, wooden cross between the two front windows, and Franklin in the *salon* of Marie Antoinette in the place of honor over a fine old white marble mantel-piece, completed the two reception-rooms.

The floor above was given over to the dormitories for outsiders, and contained little more than beds. They were small iron beds, made up without counterpanes. As every man made his own, the result would not have passed the inspection of a high-class chambermaid, but they satisfied those who lay down in them. Since outsiders came in, like Lovey and me, with little or nothing in the way of belongings, it was unnecessary to make further provision for their wardrobes than could be found in the existing closets and shelves. In the front bedroom, which I suppose must have been Miss Smedley's, there were nine small beds; in the room back of that there were seven; and in a small room over the kitchen, given up to the men positively under restraint, there were five. Twenty-one outsiders could thus be cared for at a time.

On the third floor were the dormitories for club members—men who had kept sober for three months and more, and who wore a star of a color denoting the variety of their achievements. On this floor, too, was a billiard, card, and smoking room, accessible to any one, even to outsiders, who had kept sober for three weeks. On the top floor of all were a few bedrooms, formerly those of Miss Smedley's servants, reserved for the occasional occupancy of such grandees as had preserved their integrity for three years and more; and here, too, was the sacred place known as "the lounge," to which none were admitted who didn't wear the gold or silver star representing sobriety for at least a year.

The whole was, therefore, a carefully arranged hierar-

THE CITY OF COMRADES

chy in which one mounted according to one's merit. Little Spender wore the gold star, indicating a five years' fight with the devil; and Mouse, the cook, a blue one, which meant that he had been victorious for three months. All others in the club when Lovey and I arrived were outsiders like ourselves. Outsiders gave their word to stay a week, generally for the purpose of sobering up, but beyond that nothing was asked of them. At the beginning of the second week they could either continue their novitiate or go.

This information was given me by Spender as we stood on the threshold of the bath-room before I passed in. When the tale was ended, however, the Scotchman, who had taken little or no part in our reception, pushed by me and entered.

"You'll be wanting a shave," he said, in explanation of his rudeness. "There are my things"—he got down on all-fours to show me a safety razor and a broken cup containing a brush and shaving-soap, hidden behind one of the legs of the bath-tub—"and you'll oblige me by putting them back. Daisy, the wee bye you saw at the table, is doing the same by your chum. I make no doubt your own things have been held in your last rooming-house."

When I had admitted that this was exactly the case and had thanked my friends for their courtesies, they withdrew, leaving me to my toilet.

After the good meal the bath was a genuine luxury. It was a decent bath-room, kept by the men, as all the house was kept, in a kind of dingy cleanliness. Cleanliness, I found, was not only a principle of the club; it was one of the first indications that those who came in for shelter gave of a survival of self-respect. Some of

THE CITY OF COMRADES

their efforts in that way were amusing or pathetic, as the case might be, but they were always human and touching.

While shaving I had an inspiration that was to have some effect on what happened to me afterward. I decided to let my mustache grow. As it grew strongly in any case, a four days' absence of the razor had given my upper lip a deep walnut tinge, and, should I leave the club after the week to which I had tacitly pledged myself by coming there at all, I should look different from when I entered. To look different was the first of the obscure and violent longings of which my heart was full. It would be the nearest possible thing to getting away from my old self. Not to be the same man at all as the one who had exchanged those few strange sentences with Regina Barry seemed to be the goal toward which I was willing to struggle at any cost of sacrifice.

Having bathed and shaved, I was not an ill-looking fellow till it came to putting on my shirt again. Any man who has worn a shirt for forty-eight hours in a city or on a train knows what a horror it becomes in the exposed spots on the chest and about the wrists. I had had but one shirt for a week and more—and but the one soft collar. You can see already, then, that in spite of some success in smartening up my damp and threadbare suit I left the bath-room looking abject.

I was not, however, so abject as Lovey when I found him again in the front sitting-room down-stairs.

In the back sitting-room our table companions were all arranged in a row against the wall. In spite of the fact that there were plenty of chairs, they sat huddled together on one bench; and though there was tobacco, as there were books, papers, and magazines, they sought no occupation. When I say that they could have smoked and

THE CITY OF COMRADES

didn't, the wrench that had been given to their normal state of mind will be apparent. Close up to one another they pressed, the Scotchman against the piano-mover, and the piano-mover against the wee bye Daisy, like lovebirds on the perch of a cage or newly captured animals too terrified even to snap.

Without comment on any one's part, Lovey roamed the front sitting-room alone.

"I say, sonny," he began, fretfully, as I entered, "this ain't no place for you and me."

I tried to buck him up.

"Oh, well, it's only for a week. We can stand it for that long. They're very civil to us."

"But they're watchin' of us already like so many cats."

"Oh no, they're not. They're only kind."

"I don't want none o' that sort of kindness. What do ye think that two-foot-four of a Daisy says to me when 'e offered me the loan of 'is razor? 'Lovey,' says 'e, 'I'm goin' to 'elp ye to knock off the booze. It 'll be terr'ble hard work for an old man like you.' 'To 'ell with you!' says I. 'Ye ain't goin' to 'elp me to do no such thing, because knock it off is somethink I don't mean.' 'Well, what did you come in 'ere for?' says 'e. 'I come in 'ere,' I says to 'im, 'because my buddy come in 'ere; and wherever 'e goes I'll foller 'im.'"

"Then that's understood, Lovey," I said, cheerfully. "If I go at the end of the week, you go; and if I stay, you stay. We'll be fellas together."

He shook his head mournfully.

"If you go at the end of the week, sonny, I go, too; but if you stay—well, I don't know. I've been in jails, but I 'ain't never been in no such place as this—nobody

THE CITY OF COMRADES

with no spunk. Look at 'em in there now—nothink but a bunch of simps."

"You won't leave me, Lovey?"

The extinct-blue eyes were raised to mine.

"No, sonny; I won't leave ye—not for 'ardly nothink."

CHAPTER IV

I DON'T know how we got the idea that before we went any farther we should be interviewed by Andy Christian, but I suppose somebody must have told us. We had heard of him, of course. He was, in fact, the master wizard whose incantations were wrecking our institutions. It was a surprise to us, therefore, to see, about nine o'clock, a brisk little elderly man blow in and blow past us—the metaphor is the most expressive I can use—with hardly more recognition than a nod.

“Hello, fellows!” he called out, as he passed through the hall and glanced in at Lovey and me in the sitting-room. “Hello, boys!” he said, casually, through the second door, to the other group, after which he went on his way to talk domestic matters with Mouse in the kitchen.

He seemed a mild-mannered man to have done all the diabolical work we had laid at his door. Neatly dressed in a summery black-and-white check, with a panama hat, he was like any other of the million business men who were on their way to New York offices that morning. It was only when he came back from the kitchen and was in conference with some of the men in the back parlor that I caught in him that look of dead and buried tragedy with which I was to grow so familiar in other members of the club. Superficially he was clean-shaven, round-featured, rubicund, and kindly, with a quirk about the

THE CITY OF COMRADES

lips and a smile in his twinkling gray eyes that seemed always about to tell you the newest joke. His manner toward Lovey and me, when he came into the front sitting-room, was that of having known us all our lives and of resuming a conversation that only a few minutes before had been broken off.

"Let me see! Your name is—?"

He looked at Lovey as though he knew his name perfectly well, only that for the second it had slipped his memory.

Lovey went forward to the roll-top desk at which Mr. Christian had seated himself, and whispered, confidentially, "My name is Lovey, Your Honor."

The quirk about the lips seemed to execute a little caper.

"Is that your first name or your second?"

"It's my only name."

"You mean that you have another name, but you don't want to tell it?"

"I mean that if I 'ave another name it ain't nobody's business but mine."

The head of the club was now writing in a ledger, his eye following the movement of his pen.

"I see that you're a man of decided opinions."

"I am—begging Your Honor's parding," Lovey declared, with dignity.

"That 'll help you in the fight you're going to put up." Before Lovey could protest that he wasn't going to put up no fight the gentle voice went on, "And you seem like a respectable man, too."

"I'm as respectable as anybody else — at 'eart. I don't use bad langwidge, nor keep bad company, nor chew, nor spit tobacco juice over nothink, and I keeps myself to myself."

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"All that 'll be a great help to you. What's been your occupation?"

"'Atter."

As our host was less used to the silent "h" than I, it became necessary for me to say, "Hatter, sir."

I suppose it was my voice. Christian looked up quickly, studying me with a long, kind, deep regard. Had I been walking two thousand years ago on the hills of Palestine and met Some One on the road, he might have looked at me like that.

The glance fell. Lovey's interrogation continued.

"And would you like that kind of job again—if we could get it for you—ultimately?"

"I don't want no job, Your Honor. I can look after myself. I didn't come in 'ere of my own free will—nor to pass the buck—nor nothink."

There was an inflection of surprise, perhaps of disapproval in the tone.

"You didn't come in here of your own free will? I think it's the first time that's been said in the history of the club. May I ask how it happened?"

I couldn't help thinking that I ought to intervene.

"He came in on my account, sir," I said, getting up and going forward to the desk. "He's trying to keep me straight."

"That is, he'll keep straight if you do?"

"That's it, sir, exactly."

He continued to write, speaking without looking up at us.

"Then I can't think of anything more to your credit, Mr.—Mr. Lovey—is that it?"

"I don't want no mister, Your Honor — not now I don't."

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"When a man takes so fine a stand as you're taking toward this young fellow he's a mister to me. I respect him and treat him with respect. I see that we're meant to understand each other and get on together."

Poor Lovey had nothing to say. The prospect of temptation and fall being removed by his own heroism rendered him both proud and miserable at once.

When the writing was finished the kind eyes were again lifted toward me. Though the inspection was so mild, it pierced me through and through. It still seemed to cover me as he said: "You needn't tell me your real name if you don't want to—but in general we prefer it."

"I'll tell anything you ask me, sir. My name is Frank Melbury." In order to conceal nothing, I added, "As a matter of fact, it's Francis Worsley Melbury Melbury; but I use it in the shortened form I've given you."

"Thanks. You're English?"

"I'm a Canadian. My father is Sir Edward Melbury, of Montreal."

"Married?"

"No, sir. Single."

"And you have a profession?"

"Architect."

"Have you worked at that profession here in New York?"

I gave him the names of the offices in which from time to time I had found employment.

"And would you like to work at it again?"

"I should, sir."

"As a matter of fact, we have a number of architects, not exactly in the club, but friendly toward it, and on intimate terms with us. I'll introduce you to some of

THE CITY OF COMRADES

them when—when you get on your feet. How old are you? Thirty?"

"Thirty-one."

For some two minutes he went on writing.

"How long since you've been drinking?"

"My last drink was three days ago."

"And how long since you've been actually drunk?"

"About a week."

"And before that?"

"It was pretty nearly all the time."

"It's a great advantage to you to come to us sober. It means that you know what you're doing and are to some extent counting the cost. Men will take any kind of vow when they're"—his glance traveled involuntarily to the back room—"when they're coming off a spree. The difficulty is to make them keep their promises when they've got over the worst of it. In your case—"

"I've got a motive, sir."

"Then so much the better."

I turned to Lovey.

"Lovey, would you mind stepping into the next room? There's something I want to speak about privately."

"If it's to let me in for worse, sonny—"

"No, it won't let you in for anything. It's only got to do with me."

"Then I don't pry into no secrets," he said, as he moved away reluctantly; "only, when fellas is buddies together—"

"I've a confession to make," I continued, when Lovey was out of earshot. "Last night I—"

"Hold on! Is it necessary for you to tell me this or not?"

I had to reflect.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"It's only necessary in that I want you to know the worst of me."

"But I'm not sure that we need to know that. It often happens that a man does better in keeping his secrets in his own soul and shouldering the full weight of their responsibility. Isn't it enough for us to know of you what we see?"

"I don't know that I can judge of that."

"Then tell me this: What you were going to say—is it anything for which you could be arrested?"

"It's nothing for which I shall be arrested."

"But it's an offense against the law?"

I nodded.

"And what renders you immune?"

"The fact that—that the person most concerned has—has forgiven it."

"Man or woman?"

"Woman."

His eyes wandered along the cornice as he thought the matter out. I saw then that they were wonderfully clear gray eyes, not so much beautiful as perfect—perfect in their finish as to edge and eyelash, but perfect most of all because of their expression of benignity.

"I don't believe I should give that away," he said, at last; "not now, at any rate. If you want to tell me later—" He changed the subject abruptly by saying, "Is that the only shirt you've got?"

I told him I had two or three clean ones in my trunk, but that that was held by my last landlord.

"How much did you owe him?"

I produced a soiled and crumpled bill. He looked it over.

"We'll send and pay the bill, and get your trunk."

THE CITY OF COMRADES

The generosity almost took my breath away.

"Oh, but—"

"We should be only advancing the money," he explained; "and we should look to you to pay us back when you can. It's quite a usual procedure with us, because it happens in perhaps six of our cases out of ten. I don't have to point out to you," he continued, with a smile, "what I'm always obliged to underscore with chaps like those in there, that if you don't make good what we spend on your account the loss comes not on well-disposed charitable people who give of their abundance, but on poor men who steal from their own penury. The very breakfast you ate this morning was paid for in the main by fellows who are earning from twelve to twenty-five dollars a week, and have families to support besides."

I hung my head, trying to stammer out a promise of making good.

"You see those boys in there? There are five of them, and two will probably stick to us. That's about the proportion we keep permanently of all who come in. I don't know which two they will be—you never can tell. Perhaps it will be the piano-mover and the Scotchman; perhaps the man they call Headlights and the Irishman; perhaps the little chap and some other one of them. But whichever they are they'll chip in for the sake of the new ones we shall reclaim, and take on themselves the burden of the work."

The thought that for the comforts I had enjoyed that morning I was dependent on the sacrifice of men who had hardly enough for their own children made me redden with a shame I think he understood.

"Their generosity is wonderful," he went on, quietly;

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"and I tell it to a man like you only because you can appreciate how wonderful it is. It's the fact that so much heart's blood goes into this work that makes it so living. These fellows love to give. They love to have you take the little they can offer. You never had a meal at your own father's table that was laid before you more ungrudgingly than the one you ate this morning. The men who provide it are doing humble work all over the city, all over the country—because we're scattered pretty far and wide. And every stroke of a hammer, and every stitch of a needle, and every tap on a typewriter, and every thrust of a shovel, and every dig of a pick, and every minute of the time by which they scrape together the pennies and the quarters and the dollars they send in to us is a prayer for you. I suppose you know what prayer really is?"

His glance was now that of inquiry.

"I'd like to have you tell me, sir," I answered, humbly.

He smiled again.

"Well, it isn't giving information to a wise and loving Father as to what He had better do for us. It's in trying to carry out the law of His being in doing things for others. That isn't all of it, by any means; but it's a starting-point. Spender tells me that that nice fellow Pyncheon brought you in. Well, then, every glass of soda-water Pyncheon draws is in its way a prayer for you, because the boy's heart is full of you. Prayer is action—only it's kind action."

"Thank you, sir," I said, with an effort to control the tremor of my voice; "I think I understand you."

"You yourself will be praying all through this week, in your very effort to buck up. You'll be praying in helping that poor man Lovey to do the same. In his

THE CITY OF COMRADES

own purblind way—of course I understand his type and what you're trying to do for him—he'll be praying, too. Prayer is living—only, living in the right way." He said, suddenly, "I suppose you rather dread the week."

"Well, I do—rather—sir."

"Then I'll tell you what will make it easier—what will make it pass quickly and turn it into a splendid memory." He nodded again toward the back room. "Chum up with these fellows. You wouldn't, of course, be condescending to them—"

"It's for them to be condescending to me."

He surprised me by saying: "Perhaps it is. You know best. But here we try to get on a broad, simple, human footing in which we don't make comparisons. But you get what I mean. The simplest, kindest approach is the best approach. Just make it a point to be white with them, as I'm sure they've been white with you."

I said I had never been more touched in my life than by the small kindnesses of the past two hours.

"That's the idea. If you keep on the watch to show the same sort of thing it will not only make the time pass, but it will brace you up mentally and spiritually. You see, they're only children. Fundamentally you're only a child yourself. We're all only children, Frank. Some one says that women grow up, but that men never do. Well, I don't know about women, but I've had a good deal to do with men—and I've never found anything but boys. Now you can spoil boys by too much indulgence, but you can't spoil them by too much love."

He stopped abruptly, because he saw what was happening to me.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

The next thing I knew was his arm across my shoulders, which were shaking as if I was in convulsions.

"That's all right, old boy," I heard him whisper in my ear. "Just go up to the bath-room and lock the door and have it out. It 'll do you good. The fellows in there won't notice you, because lots of them go through the same thing themselves." Still with his arm across my shoulders he steered me toward the hall. "There you are! You'll be better when you come down. We're just boys together, and there's nothing to be ashamed of. Only, when you see other fellows come in through the week—we have two or three new ones every day—you'll bear with them, won't you? And help them to take a brace."

He was still patting me tenderly on the back as with head bowed and shoulders heaving I began to stumble up-stairs.

CHAPTER V

MY acquaintance with Ralph Coningsby was the hinge on which my destiny turned. A hinge is a small thing as compared with a door, and so was my friendship with Coningsby in proportion to the rest of my life; but it became its cardinal point.

I met him first at the meeting of the club at which the Scotchman and the piano-mover presented themselves for membership. As to the five outsiders whom Lovey and I had found on arriving, Christian's prediction was verified. Three went out when their week was over and they had got sobered up. Two stayed behind to go on with the work of reform. At the end of another week each stood up with his next friend, as a bridegroom with his best man, and asked to be taken into fellowship.

That was at the great weekly gathering, which took place every Saturday night. Among the hundred and fifty-odd men who had assembled in the two down-stairs sitting-rooms it was not difficult to single out Coningsby, since he was the only man I could see in whom there was nothing blasted or scorched or tragic. There was another there of whom this was true, but I didn't meet him till toward the end of the evening.

I had now been some ten days within the four walls of the club, not sobering up, as you know, but trying to find myself. The figure of speech is a good one, for the real Frank Melbury seemed to have been lost. This other

THE CITY OF COMRADES

self, this self I was anxious to get rid of, had left him in some bright and relatively innocent world, while it went roaming through a land of sand and thorns. I had distinctly the feeling of being in search of my genuine identity.

For this I sat through long hours of every day doing absolutely nothing—that is, it was absolutely nothing so far as the eye could see; but inwardly the spirit was busy. I came, too, to understand that that was the secret of the long, stupefied forenoons and afternoons on the part of my companions. They were stupefied only because sight couldn't follow the activity of their occupation. Beyond the senses so easily staggered by strong drink there was a man endeavoring to come forth and claim his own. In far, subliminal, unexplored regions of the personality that man was forever at work. I could see him at work. He was at work when the flesh had reached the end of its short tether, and reeled back from its brief and helpless efforts to enjoy. He was at work when the sore and sodden body could do nothing but sit in lumbering idleness. He was at work when the glazed eye could hardly lift its stare from a spot on the floor.

That was why tobacco no longer afforded solace, nor reading distraction, nor an exchange of anecdotes mental relaxation. I don't mean to say that we indulged in none of these pastimes, but we indulged in them slightly. On the one hand, they were pale in comparison with the raw excitement our appetites craved; and on the other, they offered nothing to the spirit which was, so to speak, aching and clamorous. Apart from the satisfaction we got from sure and regular food and sleep, our nearest approach to comfort was in a kind of silent, tactual clinging together. None of us wanted to be really alone. We

THE CITY OF COMRADES

could sit for hours without exchanging more than a casual word or two, when it frightened us to have no one else in the room. The sheer promiscuity of bed against bed enabled us to sleep without nightmares.

The task of chumming up had, therefore, been an easy one. So little was demanded. When a new-comer had been shown the ropes of the house there was not much more to do for him. One could only silently help him to find his lost identity as one was finding one's own.

"That's about all there is to it," Andrew Christian observed when I had said something of the sort to him. "You can't push a man into the kingdom of heaven; he's got to climb up to it of his own accord. There's no salvation except what one works out through one's own sweat and blood." He gave me one of his quick, semi-humorous glances. "I suppose you know what salvation is?"

I replied that I had heard a great deal about it all my life, but I was far from sure of what it entailed in either effort or accomplishment.

"Salvation is being normal. The intuitive old guys who coined language saw that plainly enough when they connected the idea with health. Fundamentally health is salvation and salvation is health—only perfect health, health not only of the body, but of the mind. Did it ever strike you that health and holiness and wholeness are all one word?"

I said it never had.

"Well, it's worth thinking about. There's a lot in it. You'll get a lot out of it. The holy man is not the hermit on his knees in the desert, or the saint in colored glass, or anything that we make to correspond to them. He's the fellow who's whole—who's sound in wind and limb and intelligence and sympathy and everything that makes

THE CITY OF COMRADES

power. When we say, 'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,' we mean, O worship the Lord in the beauty of the all-round man, who's developed in every direction, and whose degree of holiness is just in proportion to that development."

"That's a big thought, sir," I said. "I don't believe many people who speak the English language ever get hold of it. But how does it happen that one of the two words is spelt with a 'w,' while the other—"

He laughed, showing two rows of small, regular white teeth, as pretty as a girl's.

"That was another lot of intuitive guys; and a very neat trick they played on us. They saw that once the Anglo-Saxon, with his fine, big sporting instinct, got hold of the idea that holiness meant spreading out and living out in all manly directions—and by that I don't mean giving free rein to one's appetites, of course—but they saw that once the idea became plain to us the triumph of lust would be lost. So they inserted that little bluffing, blinding 'w,' which doesn't belong there at all, to put us off the scent; and off the scent we went. Church and state and human society have all combined to make holiness one of the most anemic, flat-chested words in the language, when it's really a synonym of normality."

We exchanged these thoughts in the narrow hall of the club, as he happened to be passing, and stopped for a few words. It was always his way. He never treated us to long and formal interviews. From a handclasp and a few chance sentences we got the secret of a personality which gave out its light and heat like radium, without effort and without exhaustion.

"What do yer think 'e says to me?" Lovey demanded of me one day. "'Lovey,' says 'e, 'yer've got a terr'ble

THE CITY OF COMRADES

responsibility on ye with that young fella, Slim. If you go under 'e goes under, and if you keep straight 'e keeps straight.' What do yer think of that?"

"I think you're doing an awful lot for me, Lovey."

He slapped his leg.

"Ye got that number right, old son. There's nobody else in the world I'd 'a' done it for. If you 'adn't taken a fancy to me, like, that night, and arsked me to go 'ome with you— But, say, Slim," he went on, confidentially, "wouldn't you like to 'ave a drink?"

Wouldn't I like to have a drink? There was thirst in the very rustle of Lovey's throat. There was the same thirst in my own. It was more than a thirst of the appetite—it was a thirst of the being, of whatever had become myself. It was one of the moments at which the lost identity seemed farther away than ever, and the Frank Melbury of the last three years the man in possession.

I couldn't, however, let Lovey see that.

"Oh, one gets used to going without drinks."

"Do ye? I don't. I'd take a drink of 'air-oil if anybody'd give me one. I'd take a drink of ink. Anything that comes out of a bottle 'd be better 'n nothink, after all this water from a jug."

During the first few days at the club this was my usual state, not of mind, but of sensation. During the next few days I passed into a condition that I can best express as one of physical resignation. The craving for drink was not less insistent, but it was more easily denied. Since I couldn't get it I could do without it, and not want to dash my head against a stone. But after the words with Andrew Christian I have just recorded I began to feel—oh, ever so slightly!—that Nature had a realm of freedom

THE CITY OF COMRADES

and vigor in which there was no need of extraordinary stimulants, and of which sunshine, air, and water might be taken as the symbols. With the resting of my over-excited nerves and the response of a body radically healthy to regular sleep and simple food, I began to feel, at least at intervals, that water, air, and sunshine were the natural elements to thrive on.

My first glance at Ralph Coningsby showed me a man who had thriven on them. He was the type to whom most of us take at sight—the clean, fresh, Anglo-Saxon type, blue-eyed and fair, whom you couldn't do anything but trust.

"God! how I should like to look like that!" I said to myself the minute I saw him come in.

I knew by this time that at the big weekly meetings there were sometimes friendly visitors whose touch with the club was more or less accidental. I had no difficulty in putting this man down as one. He entered as if he were at any ordinary gathering of friends, with a nod here, a handshake there, and a few words with some one else. Then for a minute he stood, letting his eyes search the room till they rested on me, where I stood in a corner of the front sitting-room.

There was at once that livening of the glance that showed he had found what he was looking for. Making his way through the groups that were standing about, he came up and offered his hand.

"Your name's Melbury, isn't it? Mine's Coningsby. I think you must be the same Melbury who went to the Beaux Arts in the fall of the year in which I left in the spring."

"Oh, you're that Coningsby? You used to know Bully Harris?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Rather! He and I lived together for a year in the Rue de Seine."

"And he and I spent a year in the same house in the Rue Bonaparte."

"And now he's out in Red Wing, Minnesota, doing very well, I hear."

"The last time I saw him was in London. We dined together at the Piccadilly and did a theater."

"And Tommy Runt? Do you ever hear of him?"

"Not since he went back to Melbourne; but that chap he was always about with—Saunderson, wasn't it?—he was killed in a motor accident near Glasgow."

"So I heard. Some one told me—Pickman, I think it was—an Englishman—but you didn't know Pickman, did you? He left the year I came, which must have been three or four years before your time. By the way, why don't we sit down?"

In the process of sitting down I remembered my manners.

"Mr. Coningsby, won't you let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Lovey?"

Lovey was seated, nursing a knee and looking as wretched as a dog to whom no one is paying the customary attention. He resented Coningsby's appearance; he resented a kind of talk which put me beyond his reach.

When Coningsby, who seated himself between us, had shaken hands and made some kindly observation, Lovey replied, peevishly:

"I ain't in 'ere for nothink but to save Slim."

"That's what the boys call me," I laughed, in explanation.

Coningsby having duly commended this piece of self-sacrifice, we went on with the reminiscences with which

THE CITY OF COMRADES

we had begun. It was the most ordinary kind of breaking the ice between one man and another; but for me the wonder of it was precisely in that fact. You have to be down and out to know what it means when some one treats you as if you had never been anything but up and in. There was not a shade in Coningsby's manner, nor an inflection in his tone, to hint at the fact that we hadn't met at the New Netherlands or any other first-class club. It was nothing, you will say, but what any gentleman would be impelled to. Quite true! But again let me say it, you would have to be in my place to know what it means to be face to face with the man who is impelled to it.

We stopped talking, of course, when business began, Coningsby giving me any necessary explanations in an undertone, and pointing out the notables whom I didn't already know by sight.

One of these was Colonel Straight, who with Andrew Christian had founded the club. I don't believe that he had ever been a colonel, but he looked like one; neither can I swear that his real name was Straight, though it suited him. In our world the sobriquet often clings closer to us, and fits us more exactly, than anything given by inheritance or baptism. Here was a man with a figure as straight as an arrow and a glance as straight as a sunbeam. What else could his name have been? With one leg slightly shorter than the other, as if he had been wounded in battle, a magnificent white mustache, a magnificent fleece of white hair—he had all the air not only of an old soldier, but of an old soldier in high command.

"You wouldn't think, to look at him," Coningsby whispered, "that he's only an old salesman for ready-made clothes."

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"No; he ought to be at the head of a regiment."

"But the odd thing I notice about this club is that a man's status and occupation in the world outside seem to fall away from him as soon as he passes the door. They become irrelevant. The only thing that counts is what he is as a man; and even that doesn't count for everything."

"What does count for everything?" I asked, in some curiosity.

"That he's a man at all."

"That's it exactly," I agreed, heartily. "I hadn't put it to myself in that way; but I see that it's what I've been conscious of."

"As an instance of that you can take the friendship between Straight and Christian. From the point of view of the outside world they're of types so diverse that you'd say that the difference precluded friendship of any kind. You know what Christian is; but the colonel is hardly what you'd call a man of education. Without being illiterate, he makes elementary grammatical mistakes, and unusual ideas floor him. But to say that he and Christian are like brothers hardly expresses it."

I pondered on this as the meeting, with Christian in the chair, came to order and the routine of business began.

When it grew uninteresting to people with no share in the management of the club I got an opportunity to whisper, "You settled in New York?"

"I'm with Sterling Barry; the junior of the four partners."

The reply seemed to strip from me the few rags of respectability with which I had been trying to cover myself up. Had he gone on to say, "And I saw you break into his house and steal his daughter's trinkets," I should scarcely have felt myself more pitilessly exposed.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

It was perhaps a proof of what the club had done for me that I no longer regarded this crime with the same sang-froid as when I entered. Even on the morning of my first talk with Andrew Christian I could have confessed it more or less as I should have owned to a solecism in etiquette. During the intervening ten days, however, I had so far reverted to my former better self that the knowledge that I was the man who had crept into a house and begun to rob it filled me with dismay.

I had to pretend that I didn't want to interrupt the conducting of business to conceal the fact that I was unable to reply.

"You've worked in New York, too?" he began again, when there was a chance of speaking.

I had by this time so far recovered myself as to be able to tell him the names of my various employers. I didn't add that they had fired me one after another because of my drinking-spells, since I supposed he would take that for granted.

"Ever thought of Barry's?"

"I brought a letter of introduction to him from McArdle, of Montreal; but I never presented it."

"Pity."

"Yes, perhaps it was. But you see I didn't like McArdle's work, though I studied under him. As I was afraid of getting into the same old rut, I went to Pritchard."

"What do you think of Barry's things now?"

"Oh, I like them—though they're not so severe as I should go in for myself. The modern French is a little too florid, and he goes them one better."

"Just my feeling. I should like you to see a bit of work I've been doing on my own; rather a big order—

THE CITY OF COMRADES

for me, that is—in which I've had to be as American as the deuce, and yet keep to the best lines."

"Like to," I managed to whisper back as we heard Christian announce that two new men were now to be admitted to the club.

I was interested in the ceremony, having by this time got on friendly terms with both the piano-mover and the Scotchman, and learned something of their history. With necessary divergences the general trend of these tales was the same. Both were married men, both had children, in both cases "the home was broken up"—the phrase had become classic in the club; though in the one instance the wife had taken the children to her own people, and in the other she was doing her best to support them herself.

Their names being called, there was a scraping of chairs, after which the two men lumbered forward, each accompanied by his next friend. The office of next friend, as I came to learn, was one of such responsibility as to put a strain on anything like next friendship. The Scotchman's next friend was a barber, who, as part of his return for the club's benefits to himself, had that afternoon cut the hair of all of us inmates—nineteen in number; while the piano-mover had as his sponsor the famous Beady Lamont. The latter pair moved forward like two elephants, their tread shaking the floor.

I shall not describe this initiation further than to say that everything about it was simple, direct, and impressive. The four men being lined in front of Mr. Christian's desk, the spokesman for the authorities was old Colonel Straight.

"The difference between this club and every other club," he said, in substance, "is that men goes to other

THE CITY OF COMRADES

clubs to amuse theirselves, and here they come to fight. This club is an army. Any one who joins it joins a corps. You two men who wants to come in with us 'ave got to remember that up to now you've been on your own and independent; and now you'll be entering a company. Up to now, if you worked you worked for yourself; if you loafed you loafed for yourself; if you was lounge lizards you was lounge lizards on your own account and no one else's; and if you got drunk no one but you—leaving out your wife and children; though why I leave them out God alone knows!—but if you got drunk no one but you had to suffer. Now it's going to be all different. You can't get drunk without hurting us, and we can't get drunk without hurting you. T'other way round—every bit of fight we put up helps you, and every bit of fight you put up helps us.

“Now there's lots of things I could say to you this evening; but the only one I want to jam right home is this: You and us look at this thing from different points of view. You come here hoping that we're going to help you to keep straight. That's all right. So we are; and we'll all be on the job from this night forward. You won't find us taking no vacation, and your next friends here 'll worry you like your own consciences. They'll never leave you alone the minute you ain't safe. You'll hear 'em promise to hunt for you if you go astray, and go down into the ditch with you and pull you out. There'll be no dive so deep that they won't go after you, and no kicks and curses that you can give 'em that they won't stand in order to haul you back. That's all gospel true, as you're going to find out if you go back on your promises. But that ain't the way the rest of us—the hundred and fifty of us that you see here to-night—looks at it at all.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

What we see ain't two men we're tumbling over each other to help; we see two men that's coming to help us. And, oh, men, you'd better believe that we need your help! You look round and you see this elegant house—and the beds—and the grub—and everything decent and reg'lar—and you think how swell we've got ourselves fixed. But I tell you, men, we're fighting for our life—the whole hundred and fifty of us! And another hundred and fifty that ain't here! And another hundred and fifty that's scattered to the four winds of the earth; we're fighting for our life; we're fighting with our back against the wall. We ain't out of danger because we've been a year or two years or five years in the club. We're never out of danger. We need every ounce of support that any one can bring to us; and here you fellows come bringing it! You're bringing it, Colin MacPherson, and you're bringing it, Tapley Toms; and there ain't a guy among us that isn't glad and grateful. If you go back on your own better selves you go back on us first of all; and if either of you falls, you leave each one of us so much the weaker."

That, with a funny story or two, was the gist of it; but delivered in a low, richly vibrating voice, audible in every corner of the room and addressed directly and earnestly to the two candidates, its effect was not unlike that of Whitfield's dying man preaching to dying men. All the scarred, haunted faces, behind each of which there lurked memories blacker than those of the madhouse, were turned toward the speaker raptly. Knowledge of their own hearts and knowledge of his gave the words a power and a value beyond anything they carried on the surface. The red-hot experience of a hundred and fifty men was poured molten into the minute, to give to the promises

THE CITY OF COMRADES

the two postulants were presently called on to make a kind of iron vigor.

Those promises were simple. Colin MacPherson and Tapley Toms took the total-abstinence pledge for a week, after which they would be asked to renew it for similar periods till they felt strong enough to take it for a month. They would remain as residents of the club till morally re-established, but they would look for work, in which the club would assist them, and send at least three-quarters of their earnings to their wives. As soon as they were strong enough they would set up homes for their families again, and try to atone for their failure in the mean time. They would do their best to strengthen other members of the club, and to live in peace with them. The religious question was shelved by asking each man to give his word to reconnect himself with the church in which he had been brought up.

The promises exacted of the next friends were, as became veterans, more severe. They were to be guardians of the most zealous activity, and shrink from no insult or injury in the exercise of their functions. If their charges fell irretrievably away, their brothers in the club would be sorry for them, even though the guilt would not be laid at their door.

When some twenty or thirty members had renewed their vows for a third or fourth or fifth week, as the case happened to be, the meeting broke up for refreshments.

It was during this finale to the evening that Coningsby brought up a man somewhat of his own type, and yet different. He was different in that, though of the same rank and age, he was tall and dark, and carried himself with a slight stoop of the shoulders. An olive complexion touched off with well-rounded black eyebrows and a neat

THE CITY OF COMRADES

black mustache made one take him at first for a foreigner, while the dreaminess of the dark eyes was melancholy and introspective, if not quite despondent.

"Melbury, I want you to know Doctor Cautyre, who holds the honorable office of physician in ordinary to the club."

Once more I was in conversation with a man of antecedents similar to my own, and once more the breaking of the ice was that between men accustomed to the same order of associations. In this case we found them in Cautyre's tourist recollections of Montreal and Quebec, and his enjoyment of winter sports.

CHAPTER VI

THERE was nothing more than this to the meeting that night, but early the next afternoon I was called to the telephone. As such a summons was rare in the club, I went to the instrument in some trepidation.

"Hello! This is Frank Melbury."

"This is Doctor Cantyre. You remember that we met last evening?"

"Oh, rather!"

"I'm motoring out in my runabout to see a patient who lives a few miles up the river, and I want you to come along."

The invitation, which would mean nothing to you but a yes or a no, struck me almost speechless. There was first the pleasure of it. I have not laid stress on the fact that the weather was sickeningly hot, because it didn't enter into our considerations. We were too deeply concerned with other things to care much that the house was stifling; and yet stifling it was. But more important than that was the fact that any one in the world should want to show me this courtesy. Remember that I had been beyond the reach of courtesies. A drink from some one who would expect me to give him a drink in return was the utmost I had known in this direction for months, and I might say for years.

Is it any wonder that in my reply I stammered and stuttered and nearly sobbed?

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Oh, but, I say, I—I look too beastly for an expedition of—of that sort. I'm awfully sorry, but—but I—well, you know how it is."

"Oh, get out! You've got to have the air. I'm your doctor. I'm not going to see you cooped up there day after day in weather like this. Besides, I'm bringing along a couple of dust-coats—the roads will be dusty part of the way—and we shall both be covered up. Expect me by half past two."

As he put up the receiver without waiting for further protests, there was nothing for me but submission.

"I've been 'ere as long as you 'ave," Lovey complained when I told him of my invitation, "and nobody don't ask me to go hout in no automobiles."

"Oh, but they will."

He shook his head.

"Them swells 'll take you away, sonny. See if they don't."

"Not from you, Lovey."

He grabbed me by the arm.

"Will you promise me that, Slim?"

"Yes, Lovey; I promise you."

"And we'll go on being buddies, even when the rich guys talks to you about all them swell things?"

"Yes, Lovey. We're buddies for life."

With this Mizpah between us he released my arm and I was able to go and make my preparations.

In spite of the heat and the fact that on a windless day there was no dust to speak of, Cantyre was buttoned up in a dust-coat. It would have seemed the last word in tact if he hadn't gone further by pretending to be occupied in doing something to the steering-wheel while I hid my seedy blue serge in the long linen garment he

THE CITY OF COMRADES

handed me out. As even an old golf-cap can look pretty decent, I was really like anybody else by the time I had snuggled myself in by his side.

During the first mile or two of the way I could hardly listen to Cantyre, to say nothing of making conversation. In spasmodic sentences between his spells of attention to the traffic he told me of his patient and where she lived; but as it was nothing I was obliged to register in my mind, I could give myself to the wonder of the occasion, in awe at the miracle which had restored me to something like my old place in the world at the very moment when I seemed farthest away from it. Here I was, with not a penny to my name and not two coats to my back, tooling along like a gentleman with a gentleman, and as a man with his friend. Moreover, here I was with a new revelation, a convincing revelation, of something I had long since ceased to believe—that in this world there was such a thing as active brotherly kindness.

I came out of these thoughts to find that we were following the avenue with part of which I had made myself so familiar ten days before. I began to ask myself if Cantyre had a motive in bringing me this way. The houses were thinning out. Vacant lots became frequent. I noted the southern limit of my paces up and down on that strange midnight. Cantyre slowed the pace perceptibly. My heart thumped. If he accused me of anything, I was resolved to confess all.

As we passed one particular vacant lot, a tangle of nettle, fireweed, and blue succory, I noticed that Cantyre's gaze roamed round about it, to the neglect of the machine. We had slowed down to perhaps ten miles an hour.

"Do you know whose house that is?" he asked, suddenly.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

But I refused to betray myself before it was necessary.

"Whose?" I riposted.

"Sterling Barry, the architect's."

The machine almost stopped. He looked the façade up and down, saying, as he did so: "It's closed for the season. They left town a few days ago. Barry's bought the old Hornblower place at Rosyth, Long Island."

To my relief, we sped on again; but I was not long in learning the motive behind his interest.

Chiefly for the sake of not seeming dumb, I said, as we got into the country, "You and Ralph Coningsby are by way of being great friends, aren't you?"

"No," he replied, promptly. "I see him when I go to the club; not very often elsewhere. I know his sister, Elsie Coningsby, better. Not that I know her very well. She happens to be a great friend of—of a—of a great friend—or, rather, some one who was a great friend—of mine. That's all."

So that was it!

I said, after we had spun along some few miles more, "Your name is Stephen, isn't it?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

I hedged. "Oh, I must have heard some one call you that."

"That's funny. Hardly any one does. They mostly say Cantyre—or just doctor." He added, after a minute or two, "You call me Stephen, and I'll call you Frank."

Once more the swift march of happenings gave me a slight shock.

"Oh, but we hardly know each other."

"That would be true if there weren't friendships that outdistance acquaintanceships."

"Oh, if you look at it that way—"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"That's the way it strikes me."

"But, good Heavens! man, thinkⁿ of what—of what I am!"

His gaze was fixed on the stretch of road ahead of him.

"What's that got to do with it? It wouldn't make any difference to me if you were a murderer or a thief."

"How do you know I'm not?" I couldn't help asking.

"I don't know that you're not; but I say it wouldn't make any difference to me if you were."

The word I am tempted to use of myself at this unexpected offer of good-will is flabbergasted. I am not emotional; still less am I sentimental; both in sentiment and emotion my tendency is to go slow.

After a brief silence I said: "Look here! Do you go round making friends among the riffraff of mankind?"

"I don't go round making friends among people of any sort. I'm not the friendly type. I know lots of people, of course; but — but I don't get beyond just knowing them."

"Is that because you don't want to?"

"Not altogether. I'm a—I'm a lonesome sort of bloke. I never was a good mixer; and when you're not that, other fellows instinctively close up their ranks against you and shut you out. Not that that matters to me. I hardly ever see a lot with whom I should want to get in. You're—you're an exception."

"And for Heaven's sake, why?"

"Oh, for two or three reasons—which I'm not going to tell you. One of these days you may find out."

We left the subject there and sped along in silence.

This, then, was the man Regina Barry had turned

THE CITY OF COMRADES

down; and, notwithstanding his kindness to myself, I could understand her doing it. For a high-spirited girl such as she evidently was he would have been too melancholy. "Very nice" was what she had called him, and very nice he was; but he lacked the something thoroughly masculine that means more to women than to men. Men are used to the eternal-feminine streak in themselves and one another; but women put up with it only when it is like a flaw in an emerald, noticeable to the expert, but to no one else.

I asked him how he came to be what Coningsby called physician in ordinary to the club.

"By accident. Rufus Legrand asked me to go over and see what I could do for a bad case of D. T."

"He's the rector of the church opposite, isn't he?"

"Yes, and an awfully good sort. Only parson I know who thinks more of God than he does of a church. I shouldn't be surprised if one of these days he got the true spirit of religion."

"What's that?"

"What they're doing at the Down and Out."

"Oh, but they skip religion there altogether."

"They don't skip religion; they only skip the word—and for a reason."

"What reason?"

"The reason that it's been so misapplied as to have become nearly unintelligible. If you told the men at the club that such and such a thing was religion they'd most of 'em kick like the deuce; but when they get the thing without explanation they take to it every time. But you were asking me about my connection with the club. It began four years ago, when they first got into Miss Smedley's house. Fellow had the old-fashioned

THE CITY OF COMRADES

horrors—bad. As I'd been making dipsomania a specialty Legrand railroaded me in, and there I've stayed."

When we drew up at the gate of an old yellow mansion standing in large grounds Cantyre left me in the machine while he went in to visit his patient. The blue-green hills were just beginning to veil themselves in the diaphanous mauve of afternoon, and between them the river with its varied life flowed silently and rapidly. It was strange to me to remember that a short time ago I had been wishing myself under it, and that this very water would be washing the oozy, moss-grown piles of Greeley's Slip.

CHAPTER VII

NO later than that evening my life took still another step.

A little before nine, just as I was about to go to bed—our hours at the club were early—Ralph Coningsby dropped in for a word with me. I happened to be at the foot of the stairs in the hall when Spender admitted him, and he refused to come farther inside.

“Been dining with my wife’s father and mother over the way,” he said, in explanation of his dinner jacket and black tie, “and just ran across to say something while I was in the neighborhood. You said last night you’d come and see the Grace Memorial with me.”

“If you say so,” I smiled, “I suppose I must have; but it’s the first time to my knowledge that I ever heard of it.”

“Oh, that’s the bit of work I told you about—the thing I’m doing on my own. It’s over here at St. David’s. You see, when Charlie Grace died he left a sum of money to build and endow this institution in memory of his father.”

I smiled again.

“I know I must have heard the name of Charlie Grace, but it seems to have slipped my memory. All the same—”

“I’ll tell you about him to-morrow. I merely want to say now that I’ll look in about ten in the morning, and take you across the street—”

THE CITY OF COMRADES

The difficulty I had had to confront in the afternoon was before me again.

"I don't know about that, Coningsby. The fact is I'm not— Well, hang it all! Can't you see? I haven't a rag in the world but what I stand up in, and I can't go where I'm likely to run into decent people."

"You won't run into any one but carpenters and painters. I'm not going to take no for an answer, old chap. Besides, there's method in this madness, for— now don't buck!—for I'm going to put you on a job."

I could only stare vacantly.

"On a job?"

"Mrs. Grace wants some measurements and specifications which she thinks I haven't given her exactly enough; and the first thing to be done is to go over the whole blooming place with a foot-rule and a tape-measure; but I'll tell you about that to-morrow, too. For a chap with your training it will be office-boy's work; but as you're doing nothing else for the moment—"

It is needless to say that I hardly slept that night. It was not the prospect of work alone that excited me; it was that of being gradually drawn into the sphere in which I might meet Regina Barry. I was still uncertain as to whether I wanted to do that or not. There was no hour of the day when I didn't think of her, and yet it was always with a sense of thankfulness that she couldn't know where I was or guess at what had become of me. If I could have been granted the privilege of seeing her without having her see me I should have jumped at it; but the ordeal of her recognition was beyond my strength to face. Rather than have her say with her eyes, "You were the man who came into my room and tried to rob me," I would have shot myself.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

And yet I had to admit the fact that this danger was in the air. Ralph Coningsby's sister was the Elsie of that tragic night; Cantyre was the Stephen. I was being offered work by Sterling Barry's partner, and might soon be doing it for Sterling Barry himself. The fatality that brought about these unfoldings might go farther still, and before I knew it I might find myself in the precise situation that filled me with terror—and yet made me shiver with a kind of harsh delight. Before I could sleep I had to make a compromise with my courage. I would not shoot myself rather than meet her. I would meet her first, if it had to be. I would take that one draft of the joy I had put forever out of reach—and shoot myself afterward.

But in the morning I was more self-confident. Having examined myself carefully in the cracked mirror in the bath-room, I found that my mustache, which had grown tolerably long and thick, changed my appearance not a little. Moreover, food, rest, and sobriety had smoothed away the unspeakable haggardness that had creased my forehead, hardened my mouth, and burnt into my eyes that woebegone desolation which I had noticed among my companions when I arrived at the club. It is no exaggeration to say that I was not only younger by ten years, but that I was changed in looks, as a landscape is changed when, after being swept by rains, it is bathed in sunshine. The one hope I built on all this was that, were I to meet Regina Barry face to face, she would not recognize me at a first glance, while I could keep her from getting a second.

On the way across the street Coningsby told me something of Charlie Grace and his memorial. He had been the son of a former rector of St. David's—an important

THE CITY OF COMRADES

man in the New York of his day, who had outlived his usefulness and been asked to resign his parish. The son had never forgiven this slight, and the William Grace Memorial was intended to avenge it. It had been the express desire of the widow, Mrs. Charlie Grace, that he, Ralph Coningsby, should have sole charge of the building, and the work had been going on since the previous autumn. In the coming autumn the house would be ready for furnishing. It was for this purpose that Mrs. Grace required the exact measurements of each room, with the disposition of the wall spaces. During the summer she could thus consider what she would have to do when the time came in October.

Only a corner of the new building was visible from Vandiver Street, the main entrance being on Blankney Place, which was a parallel thoroughfare. Standing in the middle of the grass-plot in front of the dumpy, spurious 1840 Gothic rectory, we had the length of the dumpy, spurious 1840 Gothic church in front of us. The memorial had to be fitted in behind the chancel, on the space formerly occupied by a Sunday-school room. This space had been enlarged by the purchase of the lot in Blankney Place, giving an entry from a more populous neighborhood. The purpose of the memorial had been more or less dictated by Mrs. Ralph Coningsby, who, as Esther Legrand, the rector's daughter, had from her childhood upward worked among the people round about and knew their needs. As far as I could gather, it was to be a sort of neighborhood club, with parlors, reading-rooms, playing-rooms, a dancing-room, a smoking-room, a billiard-room, a lecture-room, a gymnasium, baths, and so on, and open to those who were properly enrolled, of both sexes and all ages. Of the committee in charge

THE CITY OF COMRADES

Mrs. Coningsby was apparently the moving spirit, though Mrs. Grace was reserving to herself the pleasure of fitting the house up.

Before going inside we discussed the difficulties of harmonizing a modern building with the efforts of the early nineteenth century, and I had an opportunity to commend Coningsby's judgment. He had kept to the brownstone of the church and rectory, and had suggested their spirit while working on sober, well-proportioned lines.

In the middle of this I broke off to say: "Look here, old chap! I hope you're not inventing this job of yours just for the sake of giving me something to do."

His frank gaze convinced me.

"Honest, I'm not. Mrs. Grace is particularly anxious to have the measurements sent down to her at Rosyth, and we're so short-handed—"

"Then that's all right. Let's go in, and you can show me what I'm to do."

As Coningsby had said, it was office-boy's work, but it suited me. It was a matter of getting broken in again, and—whether it came by accident or my friend's good-heartedness—an easy job in which there was no thinking or responsibility was the most effective means that could have been found of nursing me along. At the end of a week I was treated to the well-nigh incredible wonder of a check.

Early on a Sunday morning I took it to Christian, asking that it should be turned in toward my expenses at the club.

Having read its amount, he held it in his fingers, twisting it and turning it.

"You see, Frank," he said, after thinking for a minute,

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"the primary object of the club is not to be paid for what it spends—though that is an object—it's to help fellows to get on their feet. Of you nineteen chaps who are in the house at present twelve are regularly paying for their board and lodging, and that pretty well carries us along. If there's a deficit it's covered by the back payments of men who've gone out and who are making up. So that this isn't pressing for the minute—"

"But I should like to pay it, sir."

"Yes, of course; but it's a question of what is most urgent. Now this isn't urgent; we can extend your credit; whereas, the first bit of bluff we've all got to put up when we're pulling ourselves together is in clothes."

He asked me how long my present job would go on. I said for about three weeks.

"Then keep this check," he pursued, handing it back to me, "till you get as much again. That will be enough to turn you out quite smart. Go to Straight, at Bruch Brothers—all our fellows go to him—and he'll advise you to the best advantage."

The words were accompanied by such a smile that I, who am not emotional, felt my eyes smart.

CHAPTER VIII

THE summer passed with no more than two or three other incidents worth the jotting down.

In the first place, the day arrived when I had to make up my mind either to leave the club or to join it. Expecting some opposition from Lovey as to joining it, I was surprised to find him take the suggestion complacently.

"I've found out," he whispered to me, "that yer can jine this club—and fall. Yer can fall three times before they'll turn ye out."

"Oh, but you wouldn't want to fall in cold blood."

"Well," he muttered, doubtfully, "I ain't partic'lar about the blood. Now my hadvice 'd be this: 'Ere we are in July. That's all right; we can jine. Then in Haugust we can 'ave a wee little bit of a fall—just two or three days like. We can do the same in September; and the same in Hoctober. That 'll use up our three times, and we can come back under cover for the worst months of the winter. We can't fall no more after that; but in the spring we can try somethink else. There's always things."

"And suppose I don't mean to fall?"

He looked hurt.

"Oh, if you can keep straight without me—"

"But if I can't, Lovey? If I must keep straight and need you to help me?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

He clasped his hands against his stomach and drew a dismal face.

"That 'd be a tight place for me."

"And isn't there," I continued, "another point of view? Suppose we did what you suggest, do you think it would be treating all these nice fellows decently?"

"Oh, if you're going to start out treatin' people decent—"

"Well, why shouldn't we? We can do it—you and I together."

He drew a deep sigh.

"I must say, Slim, yer do beat everythink for puttin' things on me."

But in the end we were both admitted at one of the Saturday-evening meetings with, as usual, a large gathering of friends, and some bracing words from Straight. Pyn stood up with me as next friend, and little Spender did the same by Lovey. I have not said that during the ten days before I went to work Pyn blew in at the club during some minutes of every lunch hour to watch my progress. It was he, too, who found Lovey the job of washing windows, by which that worthy also had a chance of returning to honest ways. Indeed, though I cannot repeat it frequently enough, of the many hands stretched out to help me upward none was stronger in its grasp than that of the kindly keeper of the soda-water fountain to whom the club had given a veritable new birth.

Our admission as members had taken place while I was still doing the measurements at the memorial. By the time they were finished Coningsby had a new proposal. As it was the middle of July, he was anxious to take his wife and two little children to the country for a month. Carpenters, plasterers, painters, and plumbers were still at

THE CITY OF COMRADES

work on the building, and they couldn't be left without oversight. Would I undertake to give that—at a reasonable salary?

I had grown familiar with the work by this time, and had been able to throw into the furtherance of Coningsby's plans an enthusiasm largely sprung of gratitude. In addition I was getting back my self-confidence in proportion as I got back my self-respect. The fact, too, that in the new summer suit and straw hat to which the colonel's advice had helped me I could go about the streets without being ashamed of myself did something to restore my natural poise.

I could see that by taking this work I should really be helping Coningsby. He needed the rest; his wife and babies undoubtedly needed the change. It was not easy for a man with so important a piece of work as this on hand to get any one satisfactorily to take his place. I could accept the offer, then, without the suspicion—which any man would hate—that it was being made to me from motives of philanthropy. I was really being useful—more useful than in taking the measurements for Mrs. Grace, which any novice could have done—and making a creditable living for the first time in years.

Then, too, I had a great deal of Cantyre's company. He spent most of the summer in town; chiefly because of his patients, but partly from a lack of incentive in going away. He explained that lack of incentive to me during one of the spins in his runabout to which he treated me on three or four evenings a week. Now and then I worked Lovey off on him for an outing, but he, Cantyre, was generally a little peevish after such occasions. It was not that he objected to giving Lovey or any one else the air; it was that he suspected me of not

THE CITY OF COMRADES

really caring to go out with him. There are always men—very good fellows, too—in whom there is this strain of the jealousy of school-girls.

On this particular evening I had been kidding him about his depression, doing my best to rouse him out of it.

"Oh, I'll pull round in time," he said, in his resigned, lifeless tone. "If you knew the reason—"

I did know the reason, of course. My conscience never ceased to plague me with the fact that, though I could return Regina Barry's trinkets, Cantyre's secret was a theft I couldn't get rid of. It was, indeed, partly to lead him on to confiding it to me of his own accord, so that I might know it legitimately, so to speak, that I brought the subject up.

"I suppose it's about a girl."

So long a time passed that I thought he was not going to respond to this challenge, when he said, "Yes."

"Wouldn't she have you?" I asked, bluntly.

"She said she would—and changed her mind."

"So that you were actually engaged?"

"For about a month."

"Did she— You don't mind my asking questions, do you?"

"Not if you won't mind if I don't answer."

"Then with that proviso I'll go on. Did she tell why she—why she broke it off?"

"Not—not exactly."

"And haven't you found out?"

"Elsie Coningsby, she's her great friend, told me something of it. She said there were two kinds of women. Some liked to be wooed, and others weren't satisfied unless they were conquered."

"And you took the wrong method?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"So it seems."

"Well, why don't you turn round now and take the right one?"

His dreamy, melancholy eyes slid toward me.

"Do you see me doing that? I'm the kind of bloke that would like a woman to conquer him. If it comes to that, there are two kinds of men."

He had told me so much that I felt it right to give him a warning.

"Since you say she's a friend of Elsie Coningsby's, I mayn't be able to help finding out who she is."

"Oh, I shouldn't mind that—not with you. As a matter of fact, I should like to introduce you to her one of these days."

I broke in more hastily than I intended, "No, no; don't do that—for God's sake!"

He swung round in amazement. "Why—why, what's the matter?"

I tried to recover myself. "Oh, nothing! Only, you must see for yourself that—that after what I've been through I'm not—not a lady's man."

"Oh, get out!" was his only observation.

We lapsed into one of our long silences, which was broken when we turned back toward town.

"Look here, Frank," he said, suddenly, "you can't go on living down there in Vandiver Street. Besides, the club will be needing your bed for some one else."

"I know," I said. "I've been thinking about it. I simply don't want to move."

"You'll have to, though."

"Yes, I suppose so."

He went on to suggest a small apartment in the bachelor house he was living in himself. Now was the time to

THE CITY OF COMRADES

rent, before men began coming back to town. He knew of a little suite of three rooms and a bath which ought to be within my means. As we passed the house we stopped and looked at it. I liked it and promised to turn the matter over in my mind.

Next day I broached it to Lovey. The effect was what I expected. He grasped me by the arm, looking up at me with eyes the more eloquent from the fact that they were dead.

"Y'ain't goin' to leave me, Slim?"

"It wouldn't be leaving you, Lovey."

"Y'ain't goin' to live in another 'ouse, where I sha'n't be seein' ye every day?"

"You could get a room near."

"'Twouldn't be the same thing—not noway, it wouldn't be. Oh, Slim!"

With a gesture really dramatic he smote his chest with his two clenched fists, and drew a long, grating sigh.

We were sitting on our beds, which were side by side in one of the dormitories. It was the nearest thing to privacy the club-house ever allowed us.

"This 'll be the hend of me; and it 'll be the hend of you, Slim, if I ain't there to watch over you. You'll never keep straight without me, sonny." He was struck with a new idea, and, indeed, I had thought of it myself. "Didn't ye say," he went on, as he leaned forward and tapped my knee, "that in them rooms there was one little dark room?"

"Very little and very dark."

"But it wouldn't be too little or too dark for me, Slim, not if I could be your valet, like. I could do everythink for you, just like a gentleman. My father was a valet, and he larned me before he couldn't larn me nothink

THE CITY OF COMRADES

else. I could keep your clothes so as you'd never need new ones, and I could mend and darn and cook your breakfasts—I'm a swell cook—I can bile tea and coffee and heggs—many's the time I've done it—"

"All right, Lovey," I interrupted. "It's a bargain. We're buddies."

"No, Slim; we won't be buddies no more. We'll call that off. We'll just be master and man. I'll know my place and I'll keep it. I sha'n't call you Slim, nor sonny—"

"Oh yes, you must."

He shook his head.

"No; not after we've moved from the club. I'll call you Mr. Melbury and say sir to you; and you must call me Lovey, just as if it was my real name." He added, unexpectedly to me: "I suppose ye know it ain't my real name?"

"Oh, what does it matter?"

"It only matters like this: I ain't—I ain't—" He got up in some agitation and went to one of the windows. After looking out for a second or two he turned half round toward me. "Ye ain't thinking me any better than I am, Slim, are you?"

"I'm not thinking whether you're better or worse, Lovey. I just like you."

"And I've took an awful fancy to you, Slim. Seems as if you was my whole family. But—but you're not, sonny. I've—I've got a family. They're dead to me and I'm dead to them; but they're my family. Did ye know that, Slim?"

"I didn't know it, and you needn't tell me."

"But if I was awful bad, sonny? If I was wuss than anythink that 'd ever come into your 'ead?"

"We won't talk about that. Perhaps there are things

THE CITY OF COMRADES

that I could tell you which would show that there's not much difference between us."

"I 'ope there is, Slim. And she was terr'ble aggravatin'; a drinkin' woman, besides. I didn't drink then—'ardly not at all. It was after I was acquitted I begun that. And my two gells—well, bein' acquitted didn't make no difference to them; they'd seen. Only, they didn't swear that way in their hevidence. They swore she fell down the stairs she was found at the bottom of, her neck broken; and, bein' a drinkin' woman, the jury thought— But the two gells knew. And when I was let off they didn't 'ave no more to do with me—so I come over 'ere—"

I rose and went to him, laying my hand on his shoulder.

"Don't, Lovey. That's enough. I don't care who you are or what you've done, we'll stick it out together. The only thing is that we'll have to give up the booze."

"For good and all, Slim?"

"Yes; for good and all."

"It 'll be awful 'ard."

"Yes, it will be; but the worst of that is over."

He seized one of my hands in both of his.

"Slim, if it's got to be a ch'ice between you and liquor—well, I'm danged if—if I won't"—he made a great resolution—"give up the liquor—and so 'elp me!"

So when I moved Lovey moved with me. Washing windows having become a lucrative profession, he insisted on taking no wages from me and on paying for his own food. In the matter of names we agreed on a compromise. "Before company," as he expressed it, I was Mr. Melbury and sir; when we were alone together we reverted to the habits of Greeley's Slip and the Down and Out, and I became Slim and sonny.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

I was truly sorry to leave the club, for its simple, brotherly ways, wholesome and masculine, if never the most refined, had become curiously a part of me. I had liked the fellowship with rough men who were perhaps all the more human for being rough. For the first time in my life I had known something of genuine fraternity. I do not affirm that we lived together without disagreements or misunderstandings or that there were no minutes electric with the tension that makes for an all-round fight. But there was always some "wise guy," as we called him, to make peace among us; and on the whole we lived together with a mutual courtesy that proved to me once for all that it is nothing external which makes a gentleman. Finer gentlemen in the essentials of the word I never met than some of those who were just struggling up from the seemingly bottomless pit.

Thus the summer of 1913 became for me a very happy one. There were reserves to that happiness, and there were fears; but the optimism most of us bring to the day's work enabled me to face them. Of Regina Barry I heard much from my friend Cantyre, and I made what I heard suffice me. He was always willing to talk of this girl, whom he never named; and little by little I formed an image in my heart, which would never be anywhere but in my heart as long as I could help it. As long as I could help it I should not see her, nor should she see me. As to that I was now quite positive. Nothing could be gained by my seeing her, while by her seeing me everything might be lost.

If everything was lost in one way I was sure it would be lost in another. Because I have said little or nothing of the fight I was making you must not suppose that I was free from the necessity of making it. I was making

THE CITY OF COMRADES

it every day and hour. There were times when, if I hadn't had Lovey to think of, I should have yielded to that suggestion which had come to me as neatly as it had come to him of having a little fall. Falls were far from unknown among us. They were accepted as an unhappy matter of course. Some of our steadiest members had made full use of the three times the law of the club allowed them before finally settling down. I believed that I could exercise this privilege—and come back. But not so with Lovey! Once he failed in this attempt, I knew he would be gone. As a matter of fact, he would have failed at any time after the first week if it hadn't been on my account; so I couldn't fail on his. When I would have done it eagerly, wildly, I was withheld by the old-fashioned motto of *noblesse oblige*.

And yet in proportion as I grew stronger I realized more clearly that my future was, as it were, balanced on the point of a pin. Once I had met Regina Barry, and her eyes had said, "You are the man who stole my gold-mesh purse," I knew it would be all up with me. She wouldn't have to say a word. Her look would bring the accusation. Then, if I was weak I should go off and get drunk; I should drink till I drank myself to death. If I was strong I should shoot myself. There was just one thing of which I was sure—I should never face that silent charge a second time.

But as the weeks went by and nothing happened I began to be confident that nothing would. We reached the end of September and I never heard Regina Barry's name. Even Cantyre hadn't told me that, and didn't suppose that I knew it. I calculated the chances against our ever meeting. I built something, too, on the possibility that were we to meet she wouldn't know me again.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

In this I got encouragement from the fact that one day in Fifth Avenue I met my uncle Van Elstine. He didn't know me. He wouldn't have cut me for anything in the world; he was too good-natured and kind; but he let his wandering gaze rest on me as on any passing stranger, and went on his way. I argued then that time, vicissitude, a hard life, and a mustache had worked an effective disguise. If my own uncle, who had known me all my life, could go by like that, how much more one to whom I could be nothing but a sinister shadow seen for three or four minutes in a rose-colored gloom.

So I reasoned and became a little comforted. And then one day my arguments were put to the test.

It was quite at the end of September. The memorial was now so nearly completed that Coningsby, who had returned to town, left it almost entirely to my charge. A new bit of work at Atlantic City having come his way, he was closely absorbed in it. Mrs. Grace had motored up once or twice to consult me as to papers, rugs, and other details of interior decoration. I found her a grave, beautiful woman who gave the impression of nourishing something that lasts longer than grief—a deep regret. Our intercourse was friendly but impersonal.

Once she was accompanied by a young lady whose voice I recognized as they approached the room in which I was at work. It was a clear, bell-like, staccato voice, whose tones would have made my heart stop still had I heard it in heaven. Mrs. Grace entered the room, followed by a girl as Anglo-Saxon in type as her brother, only with a decision and precision in the manner which he had not.

In my confusion I was uncertain as to whether or not there was an introduction, but I remember her saying:

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Oh, Mr. Melbury, Ralph is so indebted to you for all the help you've given him. He says if it hadn't been for you he wouldn't have been able to get away from New York this summer."

She, too, regarded me impersonally, as her brother's assistant, and no more. I mean by that that she showed none of the interest good people generally display in a brand that has been plucked from the burning.

"Is it possible she doesn't know it?" I asked Cantyre the next time I saw him.

"Of course she doesn't. That would be the last thing Coningsby would tell her. We never speak of these things outside the club. If a fellow likes to do it himself—well, that's his own affair."

But early in October I came face to face with it all.

I was standing at one of the upper windows, looking down into Blankney Place, when I saw a motor drive up to the door. I knew it was Mrs. Grace's motor, having seen it a number of times already. When the footman held open the door Mrs. Grace herself stepped out, to be followed by Miss Coningsby, who in turn was followed by . . .

I strolled away from the window into the interior of the house. I was not so much calm as numb. There were details about which I had to speak to Mrs. Grace, but they all went out of my mind. They went out of my mind as matters with which I had no more concern. A dying man might feel that way about the earthly things he is leaving behind. I was, in fact, not so much like a dying man as like a man who in the full flush of vigor is told that he must in a few minutes face the firing-squad.

So I stood doing nothing, thinking nothing, while I listened to the three voices as they floated up, first from

THE CITY OF COMRADES

the lower floor, then from the stairway, then from the floor on which I was waiting in this seeming nervelessness.

They drifted nearer—Mrs. Grace's gentle tones, Elsie Coningsby's silvery tinkle, and then the rich mezzo, which by association of ideas seemed to shed round me a rose-colored light.

Mrs. Grace and Miss Coningsby came in together, the one in black, the other in white. Both bade me a friendly, impersonal good morning, while Mrs. Grace proceeded at once to the question of rugs. Didn't I think that good serviceable American rugs, with some of those nice Oriental druggets people used in summer cottages, would be better than anything more fragile and expensive?

I made such answers as I could, keeping my eyes on the door. Presently she appeared on the threshold, looking about with interest and curiosity in her great, dark eyes. Of the minute I retain no more than a vision in rough green English tweed, with a goldish-greenish motor-ing-veil round the head like a nimbus. She impressed me as at once more delicate and more strong than I remembered her—eager, alert, independent.

"This is to be the men's smoking-room," Miss Coningsby explained.

"Wouldn't you know it?" Miss Barry said, lightly. "One of the nicest rooms in the house—I think the very nicest. It's wonderful how well men do themselves, isn't it?"

"Oh, but in this case it's Hilda."

"It's your brother first of all. You'll see. It will be the snuggest corner of the whole place, and they won't let a woman look into it."

She glanced at me—but casually. She glanced again—but casually again. As no one introduced me, a greet-

THE CITY OF COMRADES

ing between us was not called for. But when Mrs. Grace finished her questions about the rugs and they were passing into the next room, Regina Barry turned and looked at me a third time. It was now an inquiring look, and significant.

"Elsie, who's that man?" I heard her say, after she had joined her companions.

The reply gave my name.

"Oh!"

"He's been helping Ralph all summer. That's how he and Esther were able to get away."

"Oh!"

"Now we're going on to the day nursery—"

But Regina Barry said: "Wait a minute! No; go on. I'll overtake you. I'm—I'm perfectly sure that that's the very man who—" She added, as if forcing herself to a determination: "I'm going back to speak to him. Tell Hilda I'll be with her in an instant."

So I waited, repeating to myself the formula agreed on two or three months before, that I would see her first—and shoot myself afterward.

CHAPTER IX

"H AVEN'T we met before?"

Regina Barry said this as she came into the room with her rapid, easy movement and took two or three paces toward me, stopping as abruptly as she entered.

I hung my head, crimsoning slowly.

"Yes."

"I thought so, though I didn't recognize you at first. I knew I had some association with you, but it was so vague—"

"Of course."

"Then I had no idea you were an architect."

"How could you?"

"You see, meeting you for so short a time—"

"And practically in the dark—"

"I don't remember that. But I had no chance to ask anything about you. I only hoped you'd come back."

"Oh, I couldn't have done that."

"Why not?"

"I should think you'd understand."

"I don't—considering that I asked you particularly."

"I know you asked me particularly, but anything in life—or death—would have been easier than to obey you."

"What did I do to frighten you so?"

"Nothing but show me too much mercy."

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Oh, I didn't think anything of that."

"Of what? Of the crime—or of the forgiveness?"

"Of the crime, of course."

I stepped back from her in amazement.

"You didn't think anything of—"

"Why, no! I've often done the same myself."

"You? You've often done—"

"Of course! Everybody has—at one time or another in their lives. Naturally it doesn't happen every day—and one wouldn't want it to. One wouldn't have anything left in the house if it did; but once in a way—it's nothing. What astonishes me is that you should have thought of it."

"But—but you've thought of it."

"Oh, well—that's different. But please don't suppose that I've thought of it seriously. It simply happened that that evening—" The only sign of embarrassment she gave was in grasping the greenish-goldish veil with her left hand and pulling it round over her bosom. The great eyes, of which the light made one doubtful as to the color, glowed feverishly, and the long scarlet lips threw at me one of their daring, challenging smiles. "Do you want me to be absolutely frank?"

"We began with frankness, didn't we? Why shouldn't we keep it up?"

"Well, it happened that that evening I'd broken off my engagement."

Not to betray all I had learned by my eavesdropping behind the rose-colored hangings, I merely said, "Indeed?"

"Yes; and so I was a little—well, perhaps a little excited. And anything that happened impressed me more than it would have done ordinarily. If I've thought of the way you appeared—and what happened when you

THE CITY OF COMRADES

did—it's only been because it was part of the hours right after—" There was another of those smiles that were amusingly apologetic as well as amusingly provocative. "You're—you're not married, are you?"

"No."

"Nor engaged?"

"No."

"Ever been?"

"No."

"Then you can't imagine what it is to have been engaged and nearly married—and then to find yourself free again. Everything associated with the minute comes to be imprinted on your memory. That's why I've thought of it, though I didn't for the minute recognize you as the man."

"And now that you have recognized me—"

"I hope you'll do as I asked you before, and come and see us again." She added, as she was about to turn away, "How's Annette?"

I had been puzzled hitherto; I was now bewildered.

"You mean Annette Van Elstine? Did you know she was my cousin?"

"Of course! Didn't she bring you?"

"Bring me?" I stammered. "Bring me—where?"

"Why, to our house!"

"When?"

"The time we're talking about—when you upset Mrs. Sillinger's coffee and broke the cup."

It is difficult to say whether I was relieved or not. I could only falter, "I—I don't believe I'm the man."

She came back two or three steps toward me.

"Why, of course you're the man! Isn't your name Melbury?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Yes—but—but I'm not the only Melbury. Could it have been my—my brother, Jack?"

"What's your name?"

"Frank."

She gazed at me a minute before saying: "Then—then I think it must have been—your brother. I remember now that Annette did call him Jack." She continued, "But what did you mean when—when you said it was you?"

"Don't you know?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

"Look at me again."

"I can't look at you again, because I'm looking at you all the time. You're most wonderfully like your brother."

"I don't think I am. I met my uncle Van Elstine in the street the other day and he didn't know me."

"Oh, well, strangers often see resemblances that escape members of a family. All I get by looking at you is that I see your brother. He was awfully nice. We so—we so wished he'd come back. He—he wasn't like everybody else."

"He's married now."

I wonder if I am right in thinking that a slight shadow crossed her face. There may have been, too, a forced jauntiness in her tone as she said, "Oh, is he?"

I nodded.

She turned away again, but again wheeled half round to face me.

"Well, now we know what I meant; but what on earth did you mean?"

I drew myself up for real inspection.

"Can't you think?"

She shook her head.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"I must say you seemed inordinately penitent over a broken cup, even if Mrs. Sillinger was so cross. She said you spilled the coffee all over her dress; but you didn't."

"You mean Jack."

"Oh yes! What a bother! I shall always get you mixed up in the future."

"I hope not—for his sake."

"Now don't tease me. Tell me where we met."

"If I do—"

She brightened, the smile of the scarlet lips growing vividly brilliant.

"I know. It was at the Millings', at Tarrytown."

"I'm afraid not."

"Then it was at the Wynfords', at Old Westbury? They always have so many people there—"

"Think again."

"What's the good of thinking when, if I could remember you, I should do it right away?"

"It seems extraordinary to me that you can have forgotten."

"You seem very sure of the impression you made on me."

"I am."

"And I've forgotten all about it!"

"You haven't forgotten the impression; you've only forgotten me."

"Oh, Mr. Melbury, tell me! Please! I've got to run off and overtake Mrs. Grace; and I can't do it unless I know."

You will admit that my duty at this juncture required some considering. In the end I said: "I sha'n't tell you to-day. I may do it later. In any case, I've given you

THE CITY OF COMRADES

so many tips that you can't fail to see for yourself what they lead to. You'll probably have recalled by to-night."

"Then I shall ring you up to-morrow and tell you."

"No, please don't do that; and yet, on second thoughts, I know that when you've remembered you won't want to."

She said, while withdrawing again toward the adjoining room, "You certainly know how to make a thing mysterious."

"I'm not making anything mysterious. You'll see that, after it's all come back to you."

But, having passed into the next room, she returned to the threshold to say: "I know you're only making fun of me. I never met you, because I couldn't have forgotten you. And I couldn't have forgotten you, because you're so like your brother. But we'll talk about it all some other time."

The first thing I did was to go to a room where there was a full-length mirror fixed to the wall and examine myself in the glass. Was it possible that I had changed so much in the brief space of four months? The reflection told me nothing. In the tall, slim figure in the neat gray check I could still see the sinister fellow who had slept at Greeley's Slip and skulked about the Park and crept into a house at midnight. The transformation had come so imperceptibly that the one image was no more vital to me than the other. Inwardly, too, I felt no great assurance against a relapse. I was like an insect toiling up a slippery perpendicular. Not only was each step difficult, but it might in the end land me at the bottom where I began. In other words, I had still within me the potentialities of the drunkard; and to the drunkard all aberrations are possible.

That night I put the question up to Lovey.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Lovey, do I look the same as I did four or five months ago?"

"You looks just as good to me, sonny."

"Yes, but suppose you hadn't seen me in the mean while, and had come on me all of a sudden, would you know right off that it was me?"

"Slim, if I was blind and deaf and dumb, and couldn't see nothink nor 'ear nothink nor feel nothink, I'd know it was you if you come 'arf a mile from where I was."

Since this intuitiveness was of no help to me, I worked round to the subject when, later in the evening, I had gone in to smoke a good-night pipe with Cantyre.

He had a neat little corner suite which gave one a cheery view of the traffic in Madison Avenue north and south by a mere shifting of the eyes. I sat in the projecting semicircle that commanded this because, after my own outlook into an airshaft, I enjoyed the twinkling of the lights. To me the real *Ville Lumière* is New York. It scatters lights with the prodigal richness with which the heaven scatters stars. It strings them in long lines; it banks them in towering façades; it flings them in handfuls up into the darkness; it writes them on the sky. Twilight offers you a special beauty because, wherever you are in the city, it brings out for you in one window or another that first wan, primrose-colored beacon—in some ways more beautiful than the evening star. Behind the star you don't know what there is, while behind the light there is a palpitating history. Then as you look down from some high perch other histories light their lamps, till within half an hour the whole town is ablaze with them—a light for every life-tale—as in pious places there is one for every shrine.

Those who were looking at ours saw nothing but a

THE CITY OF COMRADES

green-shaded lamp, and yet it lit up such bits of drama as Cantyre's and mine. So behind every other shining star, in tower or tenement, dwelling-house or hotel, there was tragedy, comedy, adventure, farce, or romance, all in multifold complexity, while before each human story there glowed this tranquil fire.

If I had not been an architect, with a knowledge of interior decoration as part of my profession, I might not have been worried by the sybaritic note in Cantyre's rooms. Being fond of flowers, he had sheaves of gladioluses and chrysanthemums wherever he could stack them. Over the tables he threw bits of beautiful old brocades, ineffable in color. Framed and glazed, a seventeenth-century chasuble embroidered in carnations did duty as a fire-screen. Japanese pottery grotesques and Barye bronzes jostled one another on the mantelpiece and low bookcases, while the latter housed rows of handsome volumes bound to suit Cantyre's special taste and stamped with his initials. He himself, stretched in a long chair, wore a dressing-gown of an indescribable shade of plum faced with an equally indescribable shade of blue. The plum socks and blue leather slippers couldn't have been an accident; and as I had dropped in on him unexpectedly I knew that all this *recherche* was not to dazzle any one—I could have forgiven that—but for his own enjoyment.

No one could have been kinder to me than he was—and I liked him. I reminded myself that it was none of my business if his tastes were fastidious, and that to spend his money this way was better than in lounging about bar-rooms, as I had done; and yet I could understand that a girl like Regina Barry should be impatient of these traits in a husband.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

I sat, however, with my back to it all, astride of a small chair, my pipe in my mouth, looking down on the lights and traffic.

Breaking a long silence, I said, as casually as I could do it: "I met Sterling Barry's daughter the other day—Miss Regina Barry, her name is, isn't it?"

Vague, restless movements preceded the laconic response, "Where?"

"She came to the memorial with Mrs. Grace."

Hearing him strike a match, I knew he was making an effort at sang-froid by lighting a cigarette.

"Did you—did you—think her—pretty?"

"Pretty wouldn't be the word."

"Beautiful?"

"Nor beautiful."

"What then?"

"No word that I know would be adequate. You might say fascinating if it hadn't been vulgarized; and chic would be worse."

"She's tremendously animated—and vivid."

"She has the most living eyes and mouth I've ever seen in a human being. I've never seen a face so aglow with mind, emotion, and color. She's all flame, but a flame like that of the burning bush, afire from a force within."

He spoke bitterly. "And people talk about that being conquered!"

To lead him further I said, "Has any one talked of it?"

"Didn't you know?"

"How should I know? You—you've never told me."

"Well, I'm—I'm telling you now."

My sympathy was quite genuine.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Thanks, old boy. I can see—I can see how hard it must have gone with you."

"How hard it's going, Frank. There's a difference in tense. If you knew her better—"

"I'm not sure that I care to know her better; and that, old man, isn't said out of rudeness. I don't belong to her world any more; and I'd rather not try to get back into it."

"Oh, get out! As a matter of fact I'm going to take you to see her."

"You needn't do that, because she asked me to come."

"Right off the bat like that? The first time she'd ever seen you?"

"It wasn't exactly that. She knew my brother Jack; and my cousin, Annette van Elstine, is a friend of hers."

"Annette van Elstine is your cousin? Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Oh, for reasons. I should think you'd see. Why should I claim Annette as a cousin? One of the smartest women in New York, I'm told she is."

"One of the very smartest. She could do anything for you."

"So there you are! When you think of what I was when you first met me—what I am still, really—" It seemed to me, however, that I had found my opening, so I went on in another vein. "I met Annette's father in the street one day, not long ago, and he went by without recognizing me. Have I changed very much—since the spring?"

"I should know you anywhere, Frank; but Coningsby and Christian were saying last week that they wouldn't take you to be the same man any more."

"Did they mean morally—or physically?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Oh, they meant in looks. They said they'd never seen any one in whom good clothes and a straight life had so thoroughly created a new man."

"So that you think my uncle might reasonably—"

"Pass you without recognition? Oh, Lord, yes! Besides, your mustache changes you a lot. I'd shave that off again if I were you; and you want to get back to your old self."

To end the subject I said merely: "I'm glad to hear that I don't look as I did; because—because I shouldn't like to think that the good old fellow had cut me."

CHAPTER X

MY problem was now as to how to tell Regina Barry who I was; and it would have been more urgent had I not felt sure that sooner or later she must guess. Indeed, she might have guessed already. I had no means of knowing. During the four or five days since her visit to the memorial no echo of our meeting had come back to me.

But I was not left long in doubt.

The William Grace Memorial was now practically ready for furnishing. Mrs. Grace was about to move back to town in order to undertake the task. Coningsby and I were going through the rooms one day with an eye to details that might have been overlooked when he said, "Well, there doesn't seem much more for you to do here, does there?"

I replied that as far as any further need of my services was concerned I might knock off work there and then—thanking him for all his help through the summer.

"And now," he went on, "I should like you to come in on this job at Atlantic City if you'd care to. You see, you and I understand each other; we speak the same language both professionally and socially; and it's not so easy as you might think to pick up a chap of whom you can say that. Why not come up to our little place—say to-morrow night—and dine with us, and we could talk it over? My wife told me to ask you."

THE CITY OF COMRADES

Knowing that Coningsby had been aware of the state of my wardrobe a few months earlier, I blushed to the roots of my hair as I put the question: "What shall I wear? Tails—or a dinner jacket and black tie?"

"Oh, a dinner jacket. There'll be just ourselves."

But when I went I found not only my host and hostess, but Regina Barry to make the party square.

The Coningsbys lived on the top floor of an apartment-house on the summit of the ridge between the west side of the Park and the Hudson. Below them lay a picturesque tumble of roofs running down to the river, beyond which the abrupt New Jersey heights drew a long straight line against the horizon. Sunset and moonset were the special beauties of the site, with the swift and ceaseless current to add life and mystery to the outlook.

The apartment differed from Cantyre's in that its simplicity would have been bare had it not produced an impression of containing just enough. The walls of the drawing-room were of a pale-gold ocher against which every spot of color told for its full value. On this background the green of chairs, the rose of lamp-shades, the mahogany of tables, and the satinwood of cabinets pleased and rested the eye. There were no pictures in the room but a portrait of Mrs. Coningsby, which one of the great artists of the day had painted for her as a gift. In its richness of copper-colored hair and diaphanous jade-green draperies the room got all the decoration it required.

I had heard Regina Barry's voice on entering, and knew that I was up against my fate. That is to say, the revolver lay ready in my desk. Knowing that such a meeting as this must occur some time, I was in earnest as to using the weapon on the day when her eyes accused me. As I took off my overcoat and hat and laid them on a

THE CITY OF COMRADES

settle in the hall, I said I should probably do it when I went home that night. It would depend on how she looked at me.

Meeting me at the door of the drawing-room, Mrs. Coningsby was sweet and kindly in her welcome without being over-demonstrative. I had heard of her beauty, but was not prepared for anything so magnificent. Her height, her complexion, her hair, her free movements—were those of a goddess. I liked and admired Coningsby; but I wondered how even he had caught this Atalanta and imprisoned her in a flat on the west side of New York.

“You know Miss Barry, don’t you?” were the words with which she directed me toward the end of the room, where the other guest was seated in a low armchair by a corner of the fireplace.

So the supreme moment came. I went the length of the room knowing that I was facing it.

I suppose it is instinct that tells women how to avoid comparisons with each other by creating contrasts. Knowing that in competition with her hostess she would have everything to lose, Miss Barry used Mrs. Coningsby as a foil. In other words, she had divined the fact that her friend would be in black with a spangling of blue-green sequins, and so had enhanced her own vividness by dressing in a bright rose-red. What she lacked in beauty, therefore, she made up in a brilliancy that stood out against the pale-gold ocher background with the force of a flaming flower.

As I stooped to take the hand she held up languidly I tried to search her eyes. They told me nothing. The fire in them seemed not exactly to have gone out, but to have been hidden behind some veil of film through which one could get nothing but a glow. Had she meant to

THE CITY OF COMRADES

baffle me she couldn't have done it more effectively; but, as I learned later, she meant nothing of the kind. Her greeting, as far as I could judge of it, was precisely that which she would have accorded to any other diner-out.

During the exchange of commonplaces that ensued there were two things I noticed with curiosity and uneasiness. She wore the string of pearls I had seen once before—had had in my pocket, as a matter of fact—and the long diamond bar-pin. As to her rings I could not be sure, having on the night when I meant to steal them noticed nothing but their number. But the pearls and the diamonds arrested my attention—and my questionings. Was she wearing them on purpose? Was she holding them up as silent reminders between her and me? Was I to understand from merely looking at them the charge her eyes refused to convey?

I had no means of seeking an answer to these questions, because Coningsby came in and the process of being welcomed had to be gone through again. Moreover, the commonplaces which, when carried on *à deux*, might have led to something more personal remained as commonplaces and no more when tossed about *à quatre*.

On our going in to dinner the same tone was maintained, and I learned nothing from any interchange of looks. There was, in fact, no interchange of looks. Miss Barry talked to her right and to her left, but rarely across the table. When it became necessary to speak a word directly to me she did it with so hasty a glance that it might easily not have been a glance at all. The burning eyes that had watched me so intently on our first meeting, and studied me with so much laughing curiosity on our second, kept themselves hidden. Since it was on them that I had reckoned to tell me what I was so eager to

THE CITY OF COMRADES

be sure of, I was like a man who hopes to look through a window and finds it darkened by curtains.

After dinner, however, I got an opportunity. Coningsby and his wife were summoned to the nursery to discuss the manifestations of some childish ailment. Miss Barry and I being left alone before the fire, I was able to say, "Well, have you thought of it?"

Some of the customary vivacity returned to her lips and eyes. She had at no time seemed unkindly—only absent and rather dreamy. She was rather dreamy still, but more on the spot mentally.

"Thought of what?"

"Of—of where we first met."

"Oh, that! I'm sorry to say I've been too busy to do any searching in my memory. But one of these days I must."

There was no mistaking the sincerity of her tone. She had not searched in her memory; she had not considered it worth while. Her interest in our meeting at the memorial had probably passed before she had driven away.

I must plead guilty to feeling piqued. That she should be so much in my mind and that I should occupy so small a place in hers not only disappointed but annoyed me. I said to myself, "Oh, well, if she cares so little there is no reason why I should care more." Aloud I made it: "Please don't bother about it. One of these days the recollection will come back to you of its own accord."

"Yes; I dare say." She went on without transition, "Whom did your brother marry?"

I told her.

"He wasn't like everybody else," she pursued. "I wonder—I wonder if you are?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Wouldn't that depend on what you mean by being like everybody else? I don't know that I get your standard."

"Oh, men are so much alike. There's no more difference between them than between so many beans in a bottle."

"I don't see that. To my mind they're all distinct from one another."

"In little ways, yes. But when it comes to the big ways—"

"What are the big ways?"

She weighed this, a forefinger against a cheek.

"The big ways are those which indicate character, aren't they? While the little ones only make for habits. Men differ as to their habits, but in character they're all cut on the same pattern—two or three patterns at most."

"But can't you say the same of women?"

"Very likely; only I don't have to marry a woman."

Since she had become personal, I ventured to do the same.

"Oh, so it's a question of marriage!"

"What other question is there when a girl like me is twenty-three? One has to decide that tiresome bit of business before one can tackle anything else."

I grew bolder.

"Decide as to whom to marry—or whether or not to marry at all?"

"Suppose I said as to whether or not to marry at all?"

"You mean that you'd like advice?"

"I'd listen to advice—if you've any to give."

I gathered all my strength together for the most tremendous effort of my life.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"Then, I should say this: That there are men in the world different from any you've ever seen yet. Wait!"

She laughed—an intelligent laugh, full of music, mirth, and comprehension.

"Do you know, that reminds me of something awfully strange that happened to me a few months ago? Some one else said just those words to me—or, rather, wrote them down."

I pulled my chair so that her eyes rested on me more directly.

"How?"

"Oh, I can't tell you. I said I never would—so I mustn't. I should love to—though I never shall."

"Was it—interesting?"

"Thrilling! But there! I'm not going to tell you. I shouldn't have mentioned it if what you say hadn't been so oddly like—"

But Coningsby came back into the room to ask if Miss Barry wouldn't join his wife in the nursery to see little Rufus while he was awake. In the mean time he and I would retire to his own snugery and talk business.

While I followed his account of the hotel he was building sufficiently to get his ideas and to know what he expected of me, I was saying to myself: "She doesn't know me. She doesn't know me at all. It never occurs to her as a possibility that the man who wrote those words is the one she is now asked to meet at dinner. How am I ever to get the nerve to let her know?"

When I found the opportunity I put the question, "Have your wife and Miss Barry any idea about me?"

"About you? You mean about—"

"The Down and Out."

"Lord, no! What would be the good of that?"

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"The only good would be that—that I shouldn't be sailing under false colors."

"False colors be hanged! We've all got a right to the privacy of our private lives. You don't go nosing into any one else's soul; why should any one else go nosing into yours? Why, if I were to tell my wife all I could tell her about myself I should be ashamed to come home."

I knew this argument, and yet when I came to apply it to my attitude toward Regina Barry I was not satisfied.

CHAPTER XI

A FEW days later I was surprised to receive a note from Annette van Elstine. It ran:

DEAR FRANK,—I have just heard that you are in New York—that you have been here some time. Why did you never come to see me? It was not kind. And didn't you know that your mother has been heartbroken over your disappearance? Jerry and Jack knew you were somewhere in this country, but they've kept your mother in the dark. What does it all mean? Come to tea with me—just me—on Friday afternoon at five, and tell me all about it.

Your affectionate

ANNETTE.

As this was the first bit of connection with my own family since Jerry had practically kicked me down his steps, I was deeply perturbed by it. I am not without natural affection, and yet I seemed to have died to the old life as completely as Lovey to that with his daughters. I had never forgotten Jerry's words: "And now get out. Don't let any of us ever see your face or hear your name again."

The very fact that he was justified had roused the foolish remnant of my pride.

I had loved my mother; I had revered my father; though my brothers were indifferent to me, I had felt a genuine tenderness for my sisters. But since that night on Jerry's steps it had been to me as if I had put myself

THE CITY OF COMRADES

on one side of a flood and left them on the other, and that there was no magic skiff that would carry me back whence I came. I cannot say that I grieved for them; and it was the last of my thoughts that they would grieve for me. I accepted the condition that we were dead to each other, and tried to bury memory.

And now came this first stirring of resurrection. It hurt me. I didn't want it. It was like the return of life to a frozen limb. Numbness was preferable to anguish.

"Lovey," I said, as the old man hung about me when I was undressing that night, "how would you feel if one of your daughters—"

He raised himself from the task of pulling off my boots, which to humor him I allowed him to perform, and looked at me in terror.

"They ain't—they ain't after me?"

"No, no! But suppose they were—wouldn't you like to see them?"

He dropped the boot he held in his hand.

"Y'ain't goin' to 'ave them 'unted up for me, Slim?"

"I don't know anything about them, Lovey. That isn't my point at all. But suppose—just suppose—you could see them again; would you do it?"

He shook his bald head.

"They're dead to me. I'm dead to them. If we was to see each other now 'twouldn't be nothink but diggin' up a corpse."

"Nothink but diggin' up a corpse," I repeated to myself as I turned east from Fifth Avenue, leaving the brown trees of the Park behind me, and took the few steps necessary to reach my uncle Van Elstine's door. He had married my mother's sister, and during the lifetime of my aunt the families had been fairly intimate. Of late

THE CITY OF COMRADES

years they had drifted apart, as families will, though touch-and-go relations were still maintained.

I have to admit that while waiting for Annette in the library up-stairs I was nervous. I was coming back to that family life in which I should have interests, affections, cares, responsibilities. For the past three years I had had no one to think of but myself; and if in that freedom there were heartaches, there were no complexities.

Though it was not yet dark, the curtains were drawn and the room was lighted not only by a shaded lamp, but by the flicker of a fire. When Annette, wearing a tea-gown, appeared at last in the doorway she stood for a second to examine me.

"Why, Jack!" she exclaimed, then. "I didn't know you were in New York. Have you brought Frank with you?"

"I am Frank," I laughed, going forward to offer my hand. "I didn't know Jack and I were so much alike. But you're the second person who has said it within a few days."

"It's your mustache, I think," she explained as we shook hands. "I never saw you wear one before."

"I never did."

"Do sit down. They'll bring tea in a minute. I'm so glad to see you. But if it's not a rude question, tell me why you've been here all this time and never let me know."

It would be difficult to define the conditions which made Annette at the age of thirty-three what Cantyre styled one of the smartest women in New York, but the minute you saw her you felt that it was so. My uncle Van Elstine was only comfortably off; their house was not large; though they entertained a good deal, their

THE CITY OF COMRADES

manner of living was not showy. But my aunt Van Elstine had established the tradition—some women have the art of doing it—that whatever she had and did and said was “the thing,” and Annette, as her only child and heiress, had kept it up.

As far as I could understand the matter, which had been explained to me once or twice, my aunt was exclusive. In the rush of the newly come and the rise of the newly rich, which marked the last quarter of the nineteenth century in New York, she and a few like-minded friends had made it their business to pick and choose and form what might literally be called an *élite*. By 1913, however, the *élite* was not only formed but founded on a rock as firm as the granite of Manhattan, and Annette’s picking and choosing could be on another principle. Hers was that more civilized American tendency to know every one worth knowing, which is still largely confined, so they tell me, to Washington and New York. Where her mother had withdrawn Annette went forward. Her *flair* for the important or the soon to be important was unerring. Hers was one of the few drawing-rooms through which every one interesting, both domestic and foreign, was bound at some time to pass. Being frankly and unrestrainedly curious, she kept in touch with the small as well as with the great, with the young as well as with the old, maintaining an enormous correspondence, and getting out of her correspondents every ounce of entertainment they could yield her. On her side she repaid them by often lending them a helping hand.

The warmth of her greeting now was due not to the fact that I was her cousin, but to her belief that I had been up to something. It was always those who had

THE CITY OF COMRADES

been up to something with whom she was most eager to come heart to heart. Without temptations of her own, as far as I could ever see, she got from the indiscretions of others the same sort of pleasure that a scientist finds in studying the wriggings of microbes under a microscope.

Having some inkling of this, I answered her questions not untruthfully, but with reservations, saying that I had not come to see her because I had been down on my luck.

"And how did you come to be down on your luck?"

"Can't you guess?"

"You don't look it now."

"I've been doing better lately. I've made two or three friends who've given me a hand." Carrying the attack in her direction, I asked, "How did you hear that I was in New York?"

"Hilda Grace told me. She said you'd been working on that memorial of hers. She thought it awfully strange—you won't think me rude in repeating it?—that a man like you should be only in a secondary position."

"If she knew how glad I was to get that—"

She changed the subject abruptly.

"When did you last hear from home?"

I thought it sufficient to say: "Not for a long time. I may as well admit that nowadays I never hear from home at all."

"And, if it's not a rude question, why don't you?"

"Partly, I suppose, because I don't write."

"So I understood from Jack. But, Frank dear, do you think it kind?"

I broke in with the question, the answer to which I had really come to get, "When did you last see Jack?"

"About eighteen months ago; just before he was

THE CITY OF COMRADES

married. He knew you were somewhere about, but he wasn't confidential on the subject."

"No; he wouldn't be. Did he seem all right?"

"Quite; and awfully in love with Mary Sweet. What's she like, really?"

I described my new sister-in-law as I remembered her, going on to say: "I suppose you gave Jack a good time. Did you—did you take him about anywhere?"

"Let me see. I took him to—where was it? I took him to the Wynfords'—and—and—oh, yes!—to the Barrys'. And it's too funny! I really think Regina fell in love with him at first sight. For a month or two she questioned me about him every time we met. Then all of a sudden she stopped. If she was struck by the thunderbolt, as the French put it—well, all I can say is that it serves her right."

"Serves her right—what for?"

"Oh, the way she's carried on. It's disgraceful. Do you know her? Her father is an architect, like you."

Annette's round, dusky face, which had no beauty but a quick, dimpling play of expression, was one that easily betrayed her ruling passion of curiosity. It was now so alight with anticipation that I tried to be more than ever casual.

"I've—I've just met her."

"Where?"

"Once at the memorial, when she came with Mrs. Grace; and a few nights ago I dined with her at the Coningsbys'."

"I wonder she didn't take you for Jack."

To this I was not obliged to make a response for the reason that, the man having arrived with the tea, Annette had to give her attention to the placing of the tray.

THE CITY OF COMRADES

When I had taken a cup of tea from her hand I created a diversion with the question, "What did you mean by saying the way she carried on was disgraceful?"

"Why, the way she gets engaged and disengaged. It's been three times in as many years, and goodness knows how many more experiments—"

"I suppose she's trying to find the right man."

"It's pretty hard on those she takes up and puts down in the process. She'll get left in the end, you'll see if she doesn't."

"Isn't it better to get left than to marry the wrong man?"

"The very day I took Jack to see her she'd broken off her engagement to Jim Hunter. I didn't know it at the time. It was two or three days later before it came out. If I had known it and told Jack—"

"Well, what then?"

"Oh, I don't say anything. They were awfully taken with each other. But I'm glad he was saved. If he hadn't gone straight back to Montreal he might now be in the place of poor Stephen Cantyre."

"I see a good deal of Cantyre."

"So I understand."

"Who told you?"

"Elsie Coningsby."

"You seem to have got a good deal of information about me all of a sudden."

"Because you've dropped right into the little circle in which we all know one another with a kind of village-like intimacy. New York is really a congeries of villages."

"But any one could see that Cantyre would never make a husband for a high-spirited girl like Miss Barry."

THE CITY OF COMRADES

"How do you know she's high-spirited, if it's not a rude question?"

"Oh, one can tell."

"You've seen her only twice. You must have noticed her very particularly."

"I've noticed Cantyre very particularly; and just as he wouldn't make her the right kind of husband she wouldn't make him the right kind of wife."

When Annette said anything in which there was a special motive a series of concentric shadows fled over her face like ripples from the spot where a stone is thrown into a pool.

"Well, I'm glad you don't like her, if it isn't a rude thing to say."

"What has my liking her or not liking her got to do with it?"

"Nothing but the question of your own safety. If she notices how much you're like Jack—"

"If she was going to notice that," I said, boldly, "she would have done it already."

"And so much the worse for you if she has—unless you're put on your guard."

"If you mean put on my guard against the danger of being Cantyre's successor in a similar experience—"

"That was my idea."

"Well, I can give you all the reassurance you need, Annette. In the first place, I've got no money—"

The relevance of her interruption did not come to me till nearly a year later.

"Frank dear, I must ask you, while I think of it, didn't you know that your mother was very, very ill?"

All the blood in my body seemed to rush back to my heart and to stay there. We talked no more of Regina

THE CITY OF COMRADES

Barry, nor of anything but stark fundamental realities. In an instant they became as much the essentials of my life as if Regina Barry had never existed. Annette showed herself much better informed as to my career than she pretended to be, giving me to understand that the day on which I disappeared my mother had received a kind of death-blow. She was of the type to leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness to go after that which was lost; and in her inability to do so she had been seized, so Annette told me, with a mortal pining away. With her decline my father was declining also, and all because of me.

"I've been the most awful rotter, Annette," I groaned, as I staggered to my feet. "You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, Frank, I do know it. That's why I've been so glad to get hold of you at last, and ask you to—to redeem yourself."

"Redeem myself by going back?"

She looked up at me and nodded.

"Oh, but how can I?"

CHAPTER XII

MY question was answered next evening by Beady Lamont.

Greatly to Lovey's disgust, I made it a point to attend every Saturday meeting at the club.

"Them low fellas ain't fit company for you, Slim," he would protest. "What's the use of cuttin' out the booze and bein' rich if you don't 'old yer 'ead above the likes o' that?"

"They've been awfully white with us, Lovey."

"They wasn't no whiter with us than they'd be with anybody else; and don't three out o' every five give 'em the blue Peter?"

But though we had this discussion once a week, he always accompanied me to Vandiver Street, showing his disapproval when he got there in sitting by himself and refusing to respond to advances.

I have to confess that I needed the fellowship of men who had been through the same mill as myself, in order to keep up the fight. Again let me repeat it, I am giving you but a faint idea of the struggle I had to make. No evil habit relinquishes its hold easily, and the one to which I had given myself over is perhaps the most tenacious of all. It would be wearisome if I were to keep telling you how near I came at times to courting the old disaster, and how close the shave by which I sheered away; but I never felt safer than a blind man walking

THE CITY OF COMRADES

along the edge of a cliff. More than once I tore the blue star from my buttonhole, though on each occasion I juggled myself into putting it back again. I juggled myself as I did on the morning when I gazed at the brown-green water flowing beneath Greeley's Slip. I said that what I didn't do to-day I would still be free to do to-morrow, thus tiding myself over the worst minutes, if only by a process of postponement.

But among my brothers at the club I heard so many tales of heroic resistance that I grew ashamed of my periods of weakness. What Pyn and Mouse and the Scotchman and the piano-mover and Beady Lamont could do, I told myself, I also could do. Moreover, new men came in, and more than one of the educated type turned to me for help. To a journalist named Edmonds, and to an actor named Prince, I stood as next friend, and only declined to officiate in the same capacity for Headlights, the big-eyed tailor, and the wee bye Daisy, when they returned, penitent, on the ground that I couldn't watch over more than two men efficiently. With the actor I had no trouble, but twice I had to go down to Stinson's and pull Edmonds out of a drunken spell. To keep him out was putting me on all my mettle; and in order to maintain my mettle I had to stay out myself. My courage was no whit nobler than that of the man who would turn tail in the battle if it weren't for shame before his comrades; but there is something to be got out of even such valor as that.

And in the club I got it. Perhaps we were all putting up a bluff. Perhaps those whom I looked upon as heroes were inwardly no more glorious than I. But when the fellows whom I patted on the back patted me in their turn, I was obliged to live up to their commendation.